



1 **TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO 1144**

2 I come before you as a lifelong educator, a parent, and a person who values both the role of
3 families and the importance of local decision-making. Like many in this room, I believe in
4 limited government, fiscal responsibility, and the need to protect our children. I'm a mother of
5 two wonderful young ladies who I love and protect fiercely. This bill, however, contradicts all
6 three of those principles.

7 Let me start with the issue of **government overreach**. HB 1144 removes the authority of local
8 school boards and educators — those closest to students — and instead imposes a top-down
9 mandate from Bismarck. It prescribes in minute detail how restrooms must be configured, what
10 policies can or cannot be adopted and even threatens educators with investigations and civil
11 penalties up to \$2,500 per incident. This isn't local control. It's state micromanagement of our
12 schools and our educators.

13 Most troubling to me is **Section 4** of the bill, which mandates that schools eliminate any
14 restroom design with shared or common wash areas between male and female facilities. This
15 might sound simple on paper, but the cost of implementing this provision across North Dakota is
16 staggering.

17 I've been a college professor of School Facilities since 2008 at the University of Mary, and
18 currently, **the most cost-effective and architecturally sound restroom design in modern**
19 **schools uses common wash areas** — not to push an agenda, but because it's safer, cleaner, and
20 far more efficient. It allows staff better visibility for supervision and cuts down significantly on
21 construction and maintenance costs. Our principals would readily attest to the reduced bullying,
22 opportunities for drug use, vaping, etc. with common wash areas. Furthermore, gender neutral
23 bathrooms are nice for all kids – frankly – I personally love the privacy of a family bathroom.
24 My daughter indicates that the girls at her school LOVE them – when it is time of the month
25 where they'd like a little more privacy – or if they even have a stomachache – the privacy of that
26 bathroom is wonderful. Why would we want to eliminate that? I've asked her and she just
27 laughed, as did her friends, and had no idea why anyone would care if they washed their hands
28 next to boys. She asked me “how is that different than eating lunch next to each other in the
29 lunchroom?” I think sometimes we need to remember what it was like to be a kid in the sandbox
30 with other kids. It's not evil. They're just washing their hands.

31 If this bill passes, schools would be forced to remodel those spaces, costing somewhere between
32 **\$140 million and \$200 million statewide**. That's an enormous burden on school districts — and
33 by extension, taxpayers — to solve a problem that does not exist. While many districts are
34 struggling to retain teachers, update materials, and expand mental health services, this bill would
35 make them **reallocate funds to reposition sinks and restructure restrooms**.

36 It's not a conservative principle to mandate that schools tear out functional and efficient
37 infrastructure and replace it with something less efficient — all at the taxpayer's expense.

*NDCEL is the strongest unifying voice representing and supporting administrators and educational leaders in pursuit of quality education
for all students in North Dakota.*

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1 This bill doesn't solve problems. It creates legal liabilities, threatens school districts with
2 lawsuits, places enormous financial strain on facilities, and strips educators of the ability to do
3 what they've been trained to do: support kids.

4 And let me be clear — our teachers are not political activists. They are professionals who are
5 trying to do right by every student in their care. This bill punishes them for doing so.

6 We must ask ourselves: what precedent are we setting by legislating restroom layouts with the
7 weight of state investigation behind it?

8 If we truly believe in limited government, if we truly trust local control, and if we care about
9 how taxpayer dollars are spent — then we must oppose this bill.

10 **I respectfully urge you to vote no on HB 1144. Let's work together on real solutions that**
11 **honor families, protect children, and support schools — without having our state law**
12 **becoming as such that it makes North Dakota a place that is unfriendly to live in.**