

1 Chairmen Beard & members of the Senate Education Committee,
2 For the record, my name is Mike Bitz, and I am fortunate to serve as the
3 superintendent of the Mandan School District. I want to thank Rep.
4 Tveit for bringing this legislation forward with the intention of
5 addressing concerns within our schools. I appreciate the time and effort
6 he put into drafting HB1144. However, I must testify in opposition to the
7 bill, as I believe it is unnecessary and it will have unintended
8 consequences for school districts and taxpayers across North Dakota.

9 While there have been concerns raised and even threats made about
10 students using bathrooms that do not align with their biological sex, I am
11 not aware of any evidence of this actually happening or being tolerated
12 in any of our schools. From my conversations with fellow administrators
13 across the state, we are committed to ensuring safe environments for all
14 students, and we follow district policies and all state laws. North
15 Dakota's school districts already have procedures in place to address
16 these matters when they arise.

17 Secondly, this bill takes an extreme approach by immediately involving
18 the North Dakota Attorney General if there is a report of non-
19 compliance. I believe it would be much more effective, and reasonable,
20 to allow local school administrators to resolve these issues first. If
21 concerns are brought forward, we should trust our local districts to
22 address them in a timely and appropriate manner. Only if local

23 resolution fails should the state step in. This approach aligns with North
24 Dakota's tradition of local control.

25 Finally, and most importantly, I would like to address Section 4 of the
26 bill, which deals with the prohibition of common handwashing stations.
27 In Mandan alone, we have over 15 bathrooms in our elementaries and
28 middle schools that would need to be redone. I know this will be a
29 problem for many other districts as well. Requiring districts to install
30 separate handwashing stations is an expensive mandate, that involves
31 significant construction costs. At a time when districts are already
32 navigating tight budgets, the fiscal note for this portion of the bill is
33 simply too large to justify, especially considering there is no pressing
34 public health or safety concern necessitating such a mandate.

35 In summary, while I appreciate the intent behind this legislation, it is not
36 necessary. Local school districts should be given the opportunity to
37 address concerns before escalating them to the state level, and the fiscal
38 impact of Section 4 is an unnecessary burden on our taxpayers. Thank
39 you again for your time and consideration, and I urge you to oppose
40 HB1144. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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