

Testimony in Opposition to HB 1144

Presented by Levi Bachmeier, Business Manager, on behalf of Beth Slette, Superintendent, West Fargo Public Schools

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 1144. As the superintendent of West Fargo Public Schools, I want to highlight the significant and harmful impact this bill would have on our district's school facilities, student safety, privacy, and financial resources.

West Fargo Public Schools has intentionally implemented single-stall, all-user restrooms in several of our schools because they provide greater privacy, stronger supervision, and improved safety for all learners. At Eastwood Elementary, for example, the addition of these restrooms in 2020 has led to a noticeable reduction in behavioral issues. Teachers report that during whole-class bathroom breaks, they can more effectively supervise learners, reducing misbehavior.

Additionally, all communal handwashing areas are monitored by security cameras, and many restrooms have cameras positioned outside their entrances to allow for quick identification and intervention if issues arise. This setup has been instrumental in ensuring accountability, addressing misconduct, and preventing escalation of conflicts.

As the superintendent of West Fargo Public Schools, my top priority is ensuring the safety of all learners. If HB 1144 passes, it will take away one of the most effective ways I have to ensure school safety. Instead of improving security, it will force our district to return to multi-stall restrooms—environments that have historically seen increased bullying, fights, vandalism, and other safety concerns. This bill does not protect learners—it does the opposite.

Multi-stall restrooms have long been a challenge in schools due to the lack of adult supervision inside. Behavior logs from multiple schools in West Fargo illustrate the frequent disruptions, safety risks, and disciplinary incidents that occur in traditional multi-stall restrooms. These include:

- Vaping and drug use: Students have been caught vaping nicotine and marijuana in multi-stall bathrooms across middle and high schools, often requiring disciplinary action and law enforcement involvement.
- Physical altercations: Multiple fights have taken place in multi-stall restrooms, including pre-planned fights arranged on social media, contributing to an unsafe environment.
- Inappropriate behavior: Incidents have occurred where students peeked over bathroom stalls and took pictures of learners using the toilet. These are serious privacy and safety concerns for all learners.

These problems are significantly reduced in schools that have adopted single-stall restrooms with communal handwashing stations. Unlike multi-stall restrooms, where misconduct can occur out of sight, single-stall restrooms eliminate the opportunity for group misbehavior, ensuring that learners use the facilities appropriately and return to class promptly.

According to a recent survey of our school principals, West Fargo Public Schools currently has 10 schools with single-stall restrooms that open into a shared handwashing station, and the 2025 referendum includes \$4.95 million in funding to renovate restrooms at 13 additional sites to follow this same design. If HB 1144 becomes law, our district will need to modify these spaces to comply with the new requirements—changes that come at significant financial cost to taxpayers. In some buildings, this would mean reconfiguring the layout of single-stall restrooms and relocating handwashing stations to ensure compliance. These renovations would not improve safety or learning environments; they would simply be costly, disruptive, and unnecessary.

HB 1144 does not enhance student safety or privacy. Instead, it creates unfunded mandates that force districts to spend millions of dollars undoing restroom designs that have proven to reduce behavior issues, improve supervision, and increase privacy.

I urge the committee to oppose HB 1144 and allow school districts to continue making facility decisions based on safety, privacy, and educational best practices—not restrictive, costly mandates.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

