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SB 2303

Testimony of Amy De Kok Senate Education February 5, 2025

Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education, my name is Amy De Kok. I am the executive director of the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 168 North Dakota public school districts and their governing boards. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 2330. While NDSBA strongly supports efforts to combat human trafficking and believes that education and awareness are critical components of prevention, we must respectfully oppose the bill as it pertains to the mandates imposed on public school districts.

Unfunded Mandate

The bill requires that all public school districts implement human trafficking and exploitation prevention and awareness education for students from kindergarten through 12th grade, as well as for faculty. However, the bill provides only \$48,000 in total funding statewide for implementation through the Superintendent of Public Instruction and provides no funding directly to schools to comply with its requirements. This amount is inadequate to cover curriculum development, professional training, instructional time, and reporting obligations. Without sufficient funding, the burden of compliance will fall on school districts, many of which are already struggling with limited resources.

Age Appropriateness and Sensitivity Concerns

While the bill states that the curriculum must be "developmentally appropriate," it mandates instruction on complex and potentially distressing topics such as coercion, grooming, pornography, and victim profiling as early as kindergarten. These are sensitive topics that require careful handling and may not be suitable for younger students without a more tailored approach.

Increased Administrative and Reporting Burdens

The bill mandates an annual report to the Superintendent of Public Instruction detailing the number of students and faculty trained, incidents reported, and feedback on program effectiveness. This creates an additional administrative burden on schools, requiring personnel time and resources to comply

with the reporting requirements. Moreover, the expectation to report "incidents" arising from this education may lead to challenges in tracking and interpreting disclosures made by students.

Local Control and Curriculum Flexibility

School districts should retain the flexibility to determine how best to integrate human trafficking education into existing curricula. Many districts already include personal safety and online safety education that cover elements of trafficking prevention. Mandating a separate, two-hour annual instruction session for all students and faculty may be redundant and could disrupt already limited instructional time for core academic subjects.

Parental Rights and Community Considerations

While the bill allows for optional workshops for parents and guardians, it does not provide a clear mechanism for parental opt-out should families feel the content is not appropriate for their children. School districts should have the ability to engage parents and community stakeholders in determining the most effective and appropriate way to provide this education.

Recommendations

Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all mandate, we recommend that the Legislature:

- Provide sufficient funding to support curriculum development and teacher training if human trafficking education is to be required.
- Allow school districts the flexibility to incorporate trafficking prevention education into existing programs on personal safety, online safety, and health education.
- Ensure that any requirements related to human trafficking education take into account the age-appropriateness of materials, the professional training of educators delivering the instruction, and the involvement of parents in the process.
- Reduce the administrative burden by limiting reporting requirements to essential data points and providing clear guidance on implementation.

We appreciate the bill's intent to protect and educate students, but without appropriate resources and flexibility, SB 2330 risks placing undue strain on public school districts. We urge the committee to reconsider or amend this legislation to address these concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.