

TESTIMONY on SB 2392
House Human Services Committee
February 10, 2025

Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee,

The following opinions are my own and do not represent the view or opinions of my employer.

I am submitting this testimony as a licensed social worker, as a social work educator who helps train North Dakota's behavioral and mental health workforce, and as a member of the North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-ND), and in opposition to Senate Bill 2392.

I urge you to proceed with a DO NOT PASS vote on SB 2392 for the following reasons:

SB 2392 is written in a manner meant to confuse and muddle issues around non-discrimination with language that intentionally disguises and conceals its true intentions.

It is not the goal of social work educators to indoctrinate according to any partisan ideologies, but instead to present a broad spectrum of viewpoints and perspectives. SB2392 will create unnecessary and harmful challenges for social work education in North Dakota, and the related efforts to address the state's workforce development needs. Specifically, SB2392 poses potential risks to accreditation and the eligibility of our social work graduates to be licensed, both in North Dakota and other states across the US. Additionally, these problems create challenges relating to student recruitment and enrollment.

For North Dakota's higher education system to produce social work graduates who can be licensed here and elsewhere, our programs must meet the accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The requirements of SB 2392, as currently written, stand in direct opposition to those standards. As such, our state risks losing a program that, during last Fall Semester's commencement exercises, saw its largest number of graduate students among all other programs. Additionally, that December 2024 cohort of MSW graduates included more Native American graduates than any program, and many of those newly minted social workers will be serving the State's Tribal Communities.

Currently, North Dakota offers the only social work graduate program that serves campus ad online students between Minneapolis and Washington State. We draw students from across our prairie region. SB 2392 endangers our state's ability to train and hire social workers to serve our mental and behavioral health needs. This is in direct opposition to recommendations found in the North Dakota legislature's commissioned and approved Schulte Report (2014), and as noted in that report, such actions further risk the state's receipt of federal funds under the Olmstead Act, and puts us at risk for a federal lawsuit.

Social work educators engage with the ND State Department of Health and Human Services, local hospitals and schools, and a variety of public service agencies to provide the workforce to meet local and State needs. If passed in its current form, SB 2392 puts all of that at risk.

With respect and appreciation, *Bret A Weber*

Bret A. Weber, PhD, MSW