

Catherine Benton

SB 2244

January 28, 2025

I am writing on behalf of myself as an individual citizen of North Dakota to strongly oppose SB 2244. As a parent, I care deeply about my child's upbringing and recognize the crucial role that schools play in providing a well-rounded education. While I wholeheartedly support increased parental involvement in children's education, I find this bill unnecessary, unreasonable, and impossible to enforce.

Parents already have the right to be involved in their children's schooling and have been given plenty of tools to do this. However, demanding course information or teacher training materials with three days' notice is impractical. Classroom education is not always that structured, and plans can easily be taken off track by inquisitive students or delayed by lack of understanding. This bill highlights a significant problem with politics and education: many politicians do not understand what it's like to be in a classroom today.

There are several provisions in this bill that I find deeply concerning:

1. **Overburdening Teachers and Schools:** The requirement for teachers to report every single topic discussed with students is impractical and unsustainable. Educators are already committed to involving parents in their children's education, but this legislation demands an unattainable level of micromanagement. With growing class sizes, increasing school populations, and expanding responsibilities, our teachers are already stretched thin. Many talented educators are leaving the profession due to burnout, and this bill will only worsen the strain on our education system. It's exactly the reason I stepped away from K-12 education, but I will continue to advocate for the educators still doing the amazing work of educating our youth.
2. **Erosion of Individual Rights:** This bill imposes massive restrictions on students' individual rights. Children, while under their parents' care, are still individuals with their own identities and choices. For example, the provision requiring parental consent for a child to use a name other than their legal name is overly restrictive and demeaning. Would parents need to sign off on simple nicknames? This legislation disregards students' autonomy and individuality, creating an oppressive environment that could harm their mental health.
3. **Negative Impact on Students' Social and Emotional Well-being:** Allowing parents to remove their child from activities, assemblies, or field trips not only isolates students but also denies them important social and developmental opportunities. School is not just about academics; it is about building friendships, participating in community, and learning to navigate the broader world. These restrictive measures will only further alienate students and erode the mental health of an already struggling age group.

Instead of supporting bills like SB 2244, I encourage you to do the following: 1) Spend a day in a classroom at your local school and 2) Develop other legislation that helps fund education, infrastructure, counseling, special education, salaries, and benefits. Parents already have the ability to be involved in a child's education; they don't need a law to do this. They simply need to take the initiative and support their children and the teachers who care for them thousands of hours each year.

This bill does nothing to foster morality or improve education. Instead, it risks creating an oppressive and harmful environment for students and places an unrealistic burden on educators. I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 2244 and instead focus on meaningful initiatives that enhance education for all students. Let's work on increasing graduation rates, supporting mental health, and creating positive learning environments. Parents should have a voice in their children's upbringing, but that voice should not come at the expense of students' individuality, rights, and educational experiences.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

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