

HB 2083
Senate Human Services Committee
Testimony of Mary Kolars
In Support
February 19, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am offering testimony in support of HB 2083, which would provide a penalty to perpetrators involved in child abuse and neglect. In the state of North Dakota alone, the Department of Human Services received nine-hundred and forty cases of child abuse and neglect: making it a forty percent decrease in 2019. This decrease only counts the reports of child abuse actually being recorded. However, not all child abuse and neglect are being reported not only in North Dakota but all over the country which is alarming.

One main reason for having a decline in reports is because of the coronavirus pandemic. In North Dakota, almost all institutions shut down last spring and have just started to open back up this past fall. Teachers, school nurses, social workers, coaches, doctors, school counselors and other faculty at institutions make the majority of child abuse and neglect reports. However, since the pandemic, children have not been able to interact with their teachers and mentors they see at school or through other activities on a daily basis. As a result of this, children have not been able open up to anyone since the start of the pandemic. Going to school or other activities like sports, is a way to escape from abusive living situations for many children and open up to their teachers and faculty about what may be going on in their personal lives at home.

As things have started to open back up in North Dakota, I believe there will an increase in child abuse and neglect reports in the state of North Dakota but all over the United States. The experience of isolation has had negative impacts from all walks of life since the pandemic, especially those who come from abusive homes. No one, not matter the age, should ever be

abused or neglected; especially children. In my career as a future social worker, I have learned about many cases of children being abused and neglected and am passionate about being part of the change to end child abuse in neglect in the country; starting with the state of North Dakota. I believe those who commit acts of neglect and abuse should be punished for the consequences. On behalf of those who have worked to develop this bill and make this sentencing option a reality, I urge a “do pass” recommendation on HB 2083. I thank you for your time and consideration.

References

<https://www.grandforksherald.com/newsmd/health-news/6476069-Massive-drop-in-child-abuse-reports-during-pandemic-troubles-experts-activists>