



Board of Commissioners

Diane K. Knauf
Grand Forks, ND

David Engen
Northwood, ND

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Niagara, ND

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Bob Rost
Grand Forks, ND

Tom Ford
Grand Forks County
PO Box 5726
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RE: SB2235 - A BILL relating to the creation of a school nurse grant program; and to provide an appropriation

January 27, 2020

Dear Chairman Schaible and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Tom Ford and I am the Grand Forks County Director of Administration. I am writing you today in support of SB2235

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant negative impacts on the private and public sectors, non-profits, health care industry, and of course education, which contains our largest vulnerable population – students. These negative impacts have been felt throughout the Grand Forks School District, and Grand Forks County’s rural school districts. Grand Forks county rural school districts have been in need of school nurses to provide healthcare necessary to students; however, with limited resources, these rural school districts have found it difficult to hire nurses.

Through CARES Act funding provided by the ND Office of Management and Budget, and in working directly with the rural school districts, the County provided \$34,090 to the Thompson School District and the Northwood School District each to support their school nursing program. The County provided CARES Act funding in the amount of \$178,480 to Grand Forks County Public Health to hire two school nurses for the Midway School District and the Larimore-Emerado School District. Unfortunately, this is not a permanent solution to those school districts nursing needs.

As of 2019, access to school nursing is now a BRAC (base realignment and closure) and strategic basing criteria. Access to school nursing will help determine whether or not a military installation will be subject to BRAC or may receive a new mission. During the summer of 2019, the Grand Forks region and Grand Forks AFB were assessed in the area of “quality of life” which included access to school nursing. Unfortunately, the Grand Forks region scored poorly in this category.

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In a recent New York Times article (Belluck, 2020), the Center for Disease Control states that schools with school nursing programs will be able to resume in-person classroom learning for students faster, and keep them in schools longer.

Per the National Association of School Nurses, school nurses are helping us safely reopen U.S. schools. These pandemic-related responsibilities are above and beyond the core contributions of school nurses; they traditionally address student health and mental health issues to support learning. Yet more than a quarter of our nation's schools do not have a school nurse. Most funding for school nurses is from education dollars, and since states' and schools' budgets are stretched during this pandemic, money to hire school nurses is scarce. Across the nation school nurses are helping prevent COVID-19 spread within their schools. Like the 1918 flu pandemic, we have quickly learned that school nurses are critical during this pandemic. In some places, school nurses are already implementing the COVID prevention, detection, and isolation measures that are needed to reopen schools. In Texas and elsewhere, school nurses have been instrumental in crafting school pandemic action plans and evaluating whether students should remain home because of Coronavirus-like symptoms. In other places like Massachusetts, school nurses are helping local health departments with contact tracing.

According to the National Association of School Nurses, school nurses can help keep healthy students in school. School nurses reduce the number of students who leave school because of illness or injury, thus improving attendance since students are not sent home unnecessarily. This is critical, since chronic absenteeism has a profoundly negative effect on student achievement, particularly for students of color, and is closely correlated with ongoing and/or unmet health care needs.

School nurses can increase student access to immunizations, which is especially challenging during COVID. School nurses routinely give immunizations and can help now to make sure all children are caught up on their immunizations. Schools that employ nurses have higher immunization rates, meaning that fewer vaccine-preventable infections spread to those that are not immunized.

School nurses improve access to health care, particularly for children living in poverty. Today's students face more medically complex conditions and chronic health illnesses – including asthma, diabetes, food allergies, obesity, and mental health and behavioral issues. The knowledge, assessment skills and judgment of a school nurse are needed to manage these conditions.



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The National Association of School Nurses cites research conducted and appearing in peer reviewed journals which find school nurses are cost-effective. A cost-benefit analysis of Massachusetts' school nursing program showed that for every dollar invested in the program, society would gain \$2.20. This study only accounted for the cost of parent's time off work, teachers' time and the cost of treatment. School nurses also provide cost-effective preventive services like wellness and disease prevention and early intervention services, including vision, hearing, and dental screenings.

Student access to school nurses has always been critical, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the issue to the forefront of school officials, public health officials, and elected officials. It has been demonstrated that access to school nursing services help keep students in school, therefore keeping Teachers and staff in school.

In closing, counties, cities, and school districts have been able to address this gap through CARES Act funding, however, this is only a short-term solution. SB2235 will provide the necessary funding for school districts, especially our small school districts, the means necessary to ensure students have access to this critical service.

It is for these reasons that Grand Forks County supports SB2235. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tom Ford
Director of Administration



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References

Association of School Nurses (2020). School Nurses: A Solution to Safely Open Schools and Help Students Learn.

Belluck, Pam (July 11, 2020). *How to Reopen Schools: What Science and Other Countries Teach Us*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/health/coronavirus-schools-reopen.html>.