

TESTIMONY- 3/10/2021- HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
by Heidi Budeau, Director of Special Education
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Chairwoman Lee and Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Heidi Budeau and I am the Special Education Director for the James River Special Education Cooperative located in central North Dakota. I am providing written testimony in opposition of House Bill 1416 and 1466 without amendments.

The topic of services for children birth to age 5 is important to all stakeholders- young people, parents, care givers, service providers and the education system. "Catching" our young people as early as possible and providing high quality supports for mental, social and behavioral health along with pre-academic skills instruction can only lead to a better transition into the world of K-12 education.

All stakeholders must work in conjunction with each other in an open and collaborative way. The way this bill was presented to education stakeholders, I do not believe that was done. In the Cooperative in which I represent, the Early Childhood Program Coordinator reached out to the local Head Start and Department Human Services (DHS)- Developmental Disabilities (DD) programs and neither were aware of this bill. "The first they had heard of it", they stated, until we brought it to their attention. It is highly concerning that the partners in which we work with most closely and collaboratively do not know this may happen. Even more concerning that the local DHS was unaware of a big change that may add even more to their already overflowing plates.

I completely support the premise of the bill in that all stakeholders need to work in conjunction to provide the best services to the young people in the state of North Dakota, but from reading through this bill and talking with individuals that work in the Prekindergarten world on a daily basis, I feel there is a lack of understanding of the bill and its affects on the already collaborative services at the local level.

It has been said many times nothing will change. I find that hard to believe when Prekindergarten programming will be taken out of the Department of Instruction (DPI) and moved to the Human Service Center (DHS). Change will be needed in order to ensure all levels work in a more collaborative manner.

I believe that the following items need to be addressed and would be best addressed through a study committee:

- 1.) Section 3 in regards to special education service needs to be further studied to understand the effects on a school district that may need to provide services to a variety of locations throughout the district
- 2.) The current structure of program approval through the DPI and DHS and the effects on community daycares and preschool programs including the programs located within district school buildings
- 3.) A better understanding of what the “4-year-old program” is and how it effects the current structures that are working well and the effects in rural areas that may not be able to meet all the requirements
- 4.) What did work in other states that have moved to this model and shifted back to the DPI. We need to study and learn from them in order to not repeat their mistakes.
- 5.) The Early Childhood Council MUST include a Special Education Director nominated by the North Dakota Director’s Study Council to ensure ages 3-5 special education service requirements are met prior to the transition to kindergarten
- 6.) The long-term outcomes for services and collaboration for those working in the field on a daily basis.