

Good morning legislators,

I am a school counselor in Dickinson with 12 years of experience employed with Dickinson Public Schools. I have many concerns about HB1490. 1490 will require all licensed school counselors in our state to have a psychological evaluation every two years to do our job of counseling students, otherwise, we would need to have another adult supervising us to make sure we are being appropriate and safe with students. This is absurd to me as becoming a school counselor is a lengthy process requiring a master's degree in school counseling (around 50 credit hours) as well as around 1000 hours of internships in school settings at all levels; elementary and secondary school placements. We must apply for both an ND teaching license after taking 5 additional teaching courses, and we must apply for the counselor credential and obtain both to be hired in an ND public school as a counselor. We are required to take an ethics course and sign a code of ethics which we must abide by. Failure to do so may result in a complaint to DPI /ESPB and a loss of our license and school counseling credential. The process of graduating and becoming licensed and credentialed also involves a background check. I feel there are already a lot of safeguards in the system to ensure that school counselors are safe, knowledgeable, and ethical professionals who help ensure students are safe and given opportunities to thrive. That said, any profession can have a "bad apple" who commits misconduct. That is my understanding of why this bill is being proposed, one bad apple. That "bad apple" would not go to a psychological evaluation and disclose their intent for misconduct. this attempt would not work to curb this rare occurrence of unethical and criminal school counselors.

Now, let's talk about how this bill would harm North Dakotans. I see students every day in this job who are struggling with their mental health from the most common depression and anxiety issues to the extreme of hearing voices and experiencing visual hallucinations. I have talked to parents who want to help their children, and they are met with waitlists at every agency they have called trying to get their child an evaluation from a mental health professional. Mental health resources are scarce in North Dakota, and now we are going to require the state's hundreds of licensed professional school counselors to see a mental health professional for an evaluation unnecessarily because of arbitrary law and make it even more difficult for people in need of care to get help.

This bill is also very disrespectful to counselors because we are not the only school employees who work one on-one with students in private settings. Principals, physical and occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, social workers,

and school psychologists are all among the many individuals who work one-on-one with kids in school settings, yet this bill just unjustly targets school counselors.

Client-counselor confidentiality is mandated by our ASCA code of ethics. We cannot be ethical school counselors if another adult is in the room with us when students seek us out for counseling services. I am asking you to vote no on this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration of my opinion on this matter.

Sincerely,

Whitney (Fong) Hofer