



HB 1108

January 15, 2025

Eniola Soetan, North Dakota Student Association

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Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Eniola Soetan, and I am a delegate of the North Dakota Student Association. I am writing to express my support for HB 1108.

The North Dakota Student Association (NDSA) is a student organization established in 1969 that is dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice in policy that affects Higher Education. The NDSA consists of delegates from each of the 11 public institutions that meet monthly to engage students in Higher Education policy in North Dakota (NDUS). Our mission is to empower students, foster collaboration between students across campuses in the North Dakota University System, and to advocate on issues of higher education in support of access, affordability, quality, and the student experience.

The North Dakota Student Association is committed to acknowledging and alleviating the mental health challenges faced by postsecondary students across the NDUS which we have dedicated our organization to advocating for in [NDSA-01-2425](#): A Resolution in Support of the NDSA's Legislative Priorities for the 25-27 Biennium , which supports “expanding mental health resources on all NDUS campuses”.

Additionally, in February of 2023, the NDSA passed [NDSA-19-2233](#): A Resolution in Support of a Counseling Compact, in which we outlined areas of concern such as the shortage of professionals trained to provide mental healthcare services to residents of North Dakota, as well as the long waiting times to visit with a counselor on NDUS campuses. Our support for HB

1108 acknowledges the challenges the state of North Dakota faces in regard to providing accessible and timely mental health services and responding to these challenges.

According to the state's summary of behavioral health updated in March 2023, 28.34% of adults reported binge alcohol use and 26.78% of adults reported tobacco use in the past 30 day substance use category [1], which was higher than the national averages of a 23.26% binge alcohol use and 21.28% tobacco use in the same past 30 day substance use category [1]. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) data released in November 2023 revealed that in 2021, about 20.3% of the state's population has a substance use disorder, which ranked it at #5 among U.S states as well as D.C [2]. Despite this, the number of people in substance use treatment in North Dakota in 2021 ranked lower at twelfth among U.S states as well as D.C. [2]. The state's summary of behavioral health also reported that 18.95% of North Dakota adults who needed treatment for substance abuse did not receive it [1].

While there can be many barriers to receiving treatment, lack of access is a significant barrier, in a mostly rural state like North Dakota. Incidents such as drug deaths from opioids are reported to be much higher in rural populations, which is a factor in the fact that the unintentional death from injury rate is 50% higher in rural areas compared to urban areas [3]. With 42.7% of the state's total population estimated to be living in a rural area [3], these are certainly statistics that the state should be concerned about, and numbers that we should commit to lowering.

The solution that HB 1108 calls upon evokes the power of community to tackle uniquely rural mental health and substance use challenges in such a way that the states involved do not have to overextend themselves; instead embracing partnership to better address residents' needs. Student wellness is essential to student success both inside and outside of the classroom, making it important to ensure that students have appropriate access to necessary wellness resources. In the NDUS, many of our students come from neighboring states to pursue a postsecondary education in North Dakota. Students not having to sacrifice access to mental health and substance abuse treatment while in North Dakota has the potential to create a positive impact on both student recruitment and retainment in the state of North Dakota.

To support the expansion of mental health resources on NDUS campuses and across the state of North Dakota, as well as increasing the quality of the NDUS student experience, I ask that this committee gives HB 1108 a DO PASS recommendation.

[1]- https://www.hhs.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/BH/BehavioralHealthDataBook_March2023_web.pdf

[2]- <https://www.kxnet.com/news/top-stories/how-many-north-dakotans-are-receiving-substance-abuse-treatment/>

[3]- https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/pct_rural_b/ND