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Senate Education Committee

House Bill 1328 - March 12, 2025

Testimony of Brenda Ruehl, P&A Director of Program Services

Greetings Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Brenda Ruehl and I am a Director Program Services at the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A). P&A is an independent state agency established in 1977 to assert and advance the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities. The agency's programs and services seek to make positive changes for people with disabilities where we live, learn, work and play.

P&A supports this bill in its current form. P&A provides education advocacy to students with disabilities to ensure that they can fully benefit from the promise of a free appropriate public education. Often students with disabilities face challenges around disciplinary action for disability-related behaviors. This can lead to early and ongoing involvement with the juvenile justice system. P&A appreciates the bill language on line 17 and 18 which directs schools to exhaust all disciplinary options before referring a child to juvenile court. Our hope is that this will create protections and limit justice involvement for students with disabilities.

Additionally, P&A appreciates the amendment made to this bill in the House, which removed the provision allowing schools to become custodians of students. We believe this change protects parents' rights and responsibilities, including physical care and decision-making authority relating to the upbringing, education, and health of their children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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