

**2025 HOUSE EDUCATION**

**HB 1449**

# 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

## Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1449  
2/11/2025

Relating to school counselor position requirements.
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9:00 a.m. Chairman Heinert called the meeting to order.

Members Present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck, Representatives, Conmy, Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Heilman, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Marchall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

### Discussion Topics:

- Student to counselor ratio

9:00 a.m. Representative Jonas introduced the bill.

9:05 a.m. Kevin Hoherz, Government Lead NDCEL, testified in favor on behalf of Amiee Copas and submitted testimony. #36980

9:13 a.m. Amy De Kok, Executive Director ND School Board Association, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #36989

9:15 a.m. Dr. Chris Larson, Superintendent of Milnor Public School, testified in favor and submitted testimony. #36931

9:18 a.m. April Foth, Past President, ND School Counselor Association, testified in opposition, and submitted testimony. #36882

### Additional written testimony:

Megan Leingang, 6-12 Counselor at Washburn Public School, submitted testimony in opposition. #36322

Rhonda Weigelt, School Counselor at SRCTC- North Sargent, submitted testimony in opposition #36848

Cami Krueger, independent, submitted testimony in opposition #36873

Tiffany Meier, School Counselor, submitted testimony in opposition #36946

Trista Ziegelmann, ND Resident, submitted testimony in opposition. #36858

9:30 a.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

*Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk*

My name is Megan Leingang and I am currently the 6-12 school counselor at Washburn Public School. I am writing today in opposition of HB 1449 and its negative impact it will have on our youth. School counselors are vital front-line workers in our schools that serve as the first point of contact for a number of crisis in our school. We often serve as crisis management, help with coordinating services with other community resources (social services, outside mental health needs, community pantries, etc.), and offer short term interventions to help students who are struggling. This is a vital role that others in the school do not have time or training to assist with.

School Counselors also have specific training in areas different than any other position in the school. It is not enough to fill this role with a social worker or even virtual counseling. These are great options to have in addition to a full-time School Counselor, but they are not a substitution for the role. Students need to see this person face to face and know that they are their daily. We work on relationship building and trust in order to do our jobs and that takes us being physically present in the school and building rapport with our students. More than ever, our school and students are dealing with major mental health crises. This is not going away and the answer is not in cutting back on these services, but rather creating more robust plans to give students the tools they need to survive and thrive in these times of high anxiety and mental stress. We need to have the time and resources to teach all students coping skills and tools needed to handle the big emotions we are seeing. School Counselors are the first line of defense in this crisis and we need better systems to support their work, not a system that is devaluing all they have to offer.

I have seen first-hand how a system of “others” doing bits and pieces of the job is not effective in creating a sustainable and well-balanced program. The first school I worked for at the beginning of my career did not have a School Counselor at all the year before I was hired. They had a Social Worker coming in to teach classroom lessons, a Career Advisor to do high school planning once a week, and a School Psychologist to meet with individuals one day a week. None of the students had a close or trusting relationship with these people because they were there so infrequently. There was nobody planning programs to help with resources out in the community either. Students never knew who was there and if they could even get help with issues they were facing. Over 5 years at that school, I built a comprehensive school counseling program from the ground up. We began to give students skills and all teachers were trained in techniques to help students with issues. I reached out to local community resources and began partnering with them to get resources for families and assisted in filling out forms to get resources families needed (food, clothing, reduced rates on utilities, etc.). Finally, I was also a face in the building every day that students knew they could talk to about problems. I was the one to begin work on skills and give resources on how to deal with serious mental health issues as well as navigate how to handle situations at school or at home. I also referred students to further mental health resources if their situations required expertise beyond my training. With everything that I do in my role as a School Counselor, I don’t see how anyone else has the time or training to do all of these things. Others that are similarly trained are not a substitute for our role. I am asking that our profession be respected, valued, and made a priority in our school system since I see us as being a vital role to the overall well-being of our students.

Rhonda Weigelt  
School Counselor  
SRCTC: North Sargent School  
16 1st St. SW  
Gwinner, ND 58040

February 10, 2025

House Education Committee

Subject: Testimony Regarding House Bill 1449

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 1449 as written, which would alter the current requirement for schools to make a reasonable effort to have one full-time school counselor for every 300 students in grades seven through twelve. I oppose this bill because school counselors provide a unique and essential service that cannot be replaced by other school personnel.

School counselors play a vital role in supporting students' academic, career, and social-emotional development. Reducing or eliminating the expectation for schools to maintain a reasonable counselor-to-student ratio would negatively impact the quality of support students receive. Other school personnel, while valuable in their respective roles, do not have the specialized training and ethical framework required to provide comprehensive school counseling services. Without dedicated school counselors, students may lose access to critical mental health support, academic guidance, and postsecondary planning assistance.

I urge you to oppose this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me at [rjweigelt@gmail.com](mailto:rjweigelt@gmail.com) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Rhonda Weigelt

My name is Trista Ziegelmann, I currently hold a Bachelor's Degree in sSocial Studies Secondary Education and a Master's Degree in Counseling and Student Affairs, and have worked as a Professional School Counselor for 16 years. I currently work in a growing school district of close to 1,100 students and have a current caseload of 320 high school students, expected to grow to 350 next year. I am writing in opposition to HB 1449, a bill to "amend and reenact section 15.1-06-19 of the North Dakota Century Code relating to school counselor position requirements".

School counselors help all students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. By grouping other helping professions or career advisors into counselor positions, we are not creating equitable systems to support our learners. My work with students often is done in collaboration with the mental health counselor, social worker, special education teacher, school resource officer. To say a different helping profession is equal to that of a school counselor is not accurate.

Not all students have access to the mental health providers, whether because of cost or lack of insurance, lack of parental involvement or support, lack of resources or knowledge of. The National Institutes of Health, cite the "Lack of providers and geographic isolation are 2 major contributors to reduced access to youth mental health services in rural areas" and "Significant inequities in school-based mental health services exist outside of urban areas (Graves)." Not all students have access to school-based social workers for the same or similar reasons. All students have access to school counselors.

Career advisors, while within a portion of the work of School Counselors, lack the professional and comprehensive training of a school counselor and only focus on a fragment of a portion of what consumes a students' school day.

While HB 1449 seems of offer a short-term resolution to the school counselor shortage and growing needs of learners and school districts, HB 1449 will cause harm and gaps in services in the long-term. All students have access to school counselors and HB 1449 will erode access and further the disparities to support services for students and families, and harm school districts in the long-term.

Graves JM, Abshire DA, Mackelprang JL, Dilley JA, Amiri S, Chacon CM, Mason A. Geographic Disparities in the Availability of Mental Health Services in U.S. Public Schools. *Am J Prev Med*. 2023 Jan;64(1):1-8. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2022.09.003. Epub 2022 Oct 22. PMID: 36283908; PMCID: PMC9772127.

Cami Jo Krueger  
1031 W. Owens Ave.  
Bismarck, ND 58501

February 10, 2025

Dear Chairperson Pat Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Cami Jo Krueger and I am writing as a concerned parent of a school-aged child in North Dakota to oppose HB 1449. This bill, which proposes changing the language from “must” to “shall” in making a reasonable effort to filling school counselor positions jeopardizes the well-being for the whole school environment.

School counselors play a critical role in our education system. I can attest to that when my children were younger and their school counselors gave them needed resources and techniques in learning essential skills. They provide academic guidance, mental health support, and career planning services that are essential for students’ overall development. In a time when students are facing unprecedented challenges—including academic pressures, social struggles, and mental health issues—counselors are often the first line of support. Removing the clear requirement to employ school counselors would weaken this support system and leave many students without the help they desperately need. My child included.

The proposed change from “must” to “shall” may seem like a small adjustment, but the implications are significant. It gives administrators the flexibility to deem these positions optional if they cannot find applicants. While I understand the difficulty in hiring counselors, this is not a problem that will be solved by eliminating the requirement. Instead, it sends a message that these roles are expendable, which they are not.

As a parent, I see firsthand the vital impact counselors have on students’ lives. These professionals are not a luxury; they are a necessity. By removing the mandate to employ them, HB 1449 puts our children’s education, mental health, and future success at risk.

I urge you to vote against HB 1449 and instead support initiatives that strengthen our schools, ensure equitable access to resources, and prioritize the well-being of our students. Thank you for considering this important matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Cami Jo Krueger  
Cjow04@gmail.com

Chairman Heinert & Members of the House Education Committee:

For the record, my name is April Foth. As Past President of the North Dakota School Counselor's Association and school counselor of 15 years, I am here today to ask for a DO NOT PASS as written on HB 1449.

Just before this bill was introduced, Angel Lindseth, our current association President, and I met virtually with NDCEL to discuss this bill. We were able to find agreement with a couple minor amendments and were ready to support this bill as per that discussion and collaboration on the bill sent to us to review. However, upon reading the bill that was actually introduced, there were a number of changes from the bill we reviewed and discussed previously. This impacted our readiness to support this bill which why we are here today urging a DO NOT PASS as written testimony. We would propose the following amendments to return the language of this bill back to what was agreed upon between us and NDCEL.

**Proposed Amendment 1:** Subsection 1 (page 1 lines 7-9), there had been no change in this language when we met with NDCEL. The bill that was introduced changed the language from must to shall and added make a reasonable effort. This portion of the bill has been in effect since 2009 and there has not been much concern over this requirement at the 7-12 level. With Career Advisors being able to help fill up to 1/3 of the full-time equivalency requirement, we see no reason for a change to the language here and urge the following language for subsection 1:

1. ~~Beginning with the 2010-11 school year, each A~~ school district must ~~shall make a reasonable effort to~~ have available one full-time equivalent school counselor for every three hundred students in grades seven through twelve.

**Proposed Amendment 2:** Subdivisions a, b & c of subsection 5 (page 1 lines 21-22 & page 2 lines 1-4), the language of the bill we reviewed with NDCEL utilized active tense, whereas the bill in front of you is in past tense. From our standpoint, it is imperative that we maintain the active tense to ensure districts continue to actively recruit qualified school counselors until one can be secured. The past tense language insinuates that as long as districts have tried to fill positions, they have met the requirement. It is not clear whether or not they need to continue such efforts. Therefore, we urge the following language for Subsection 5, subdivisions a, b & c:

5. The ~~annual~~ requirement under subsection 1 or 2 is met if the school district ~~is~~:
  - a. ~~Actively recruited and attempted~~ recruiting and attempting to hire the requisite number of qualified school counselors or career advisors;
  - b. ~~Explored~~ Exploring alternative methods to temporarily meet student needs if until a full - time school counselor position ~~was not~~ can be filled, including shared services agreements with other districts, contracted services, or virtual counseling options; and
  - c. ~~Documented~~ Documenting all the actions taken annually under subdivisions a and b to meet the requirement under subsections 1 and 2.

**Proposed Amendment 3:** Subsection 6 (page 2 lines 5-6). Our understanding is that even though there are no ramifications for districts when they are unable to find school counselors to fill this requirement, being flagged in the system as noncompliant is still a concern for them. As a possible solution to this concern, we would propose the following language under subsection 6:

6. A school district shall provide annual documentation under subdivision c in their annual report to DPI. If all requirements under subdivisions a and b are met, a district will be considered in compliance with this requirement ~~upon request to any individual the documentation under subsection 5.~~

In conclusion, we recognize that while there has been an influx of students in our North Dakota school counseling master's degree programs, there are districts that are still struggling to fill their open school counseling positions. It is our goal to work together with NDCEL, district administrators and school boards to meet the needs of the students we collectively serve. In order to do so, we must maintain the integrity of the mental health services and supports available in our schools, which includes student access to school counseling services.

The amendments we propose allow for this by ensuring schools continue efforts to secure the required school counselors for their district. This helps to maintain manageable caseloads for the school counselors of our state, protects comprehensive school counseling programs which ensures that ALL students receive the academic, social-emotional, and career support they need to thrive, and increases retention of the school counselors currently in the profession.

Thank you for your time this morning. We ask that you consider our proposed amendments as you work on this bill to ensure every possible attempt is made to provide ALL our North Dakota students access to the valuable programming that school counselors provide.

Respectfully,  
April Foth  
North Dakota School Counselor Association  
Past President



## Milnor Public School District No. 2

530 Fifth Street | P.O. Box 369

Milnor, North Dakota 58060-0369

Phone: 701-427-5237 | Fax: 701-427-5304

[www.milnor.k12.nd.us](http://www.milnor.k12.nd.us)

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Chris Larson, Superintendent and Activities Director

Ryan Weber, High School Principal

Theresa Wittich, Elementary Principal

### 1 Testimony in Support of House Bill 1449

2 North Dakota Legislative Assembly  
3 February 11, 2024

4  
5 Chair Heinert and Members of the Committee,

6 My name is Dr. Chris Larson, and I serve as the Superintendent of Milnor Public School. I appreciate  
7 the opportunity to testify in **support** of House Bill 1449, which acknowledges the critical need for  
8 school counselors while providing **practical flexibility** for districts to meet this requirement.

9 At a time when student mental health, academic planning, and career readiness are more important than  
10 ever, school counselors play a vital role in supporting student success. However, many districts,  
11 especially in rural areas, struggle to recruit and retain licensed school counselors due to workforce  
12 shortages and limited applicant pools. House Bill 1449 provides a common-sense approach to  
13 addressing this challenge while ensuring that students continue to receive necessary support.

### 14 Key Provisions That Strengthen Our Schools

#### 15 1. Prioritizing Recruitment & Hiring (Section 5a)

16 This bill reaffirms our commitment to hiring qualified school counselors by requiring districts to  
17 actively recruit and attempt to fill positions. As a district leader, I can attest that we continually advertise  
18 positions, network with universities, and explore incentives to attract qualified professionals.  
19 Unfortunately, the availability of licensed counselors remains a barrier for many schools, especially in  
20 rural North Dakota.

21 A personal example of this challenge occurred when I had a highly qualified social worker with a  
22 master's degree in social work express interest in filling our open school counselor position. She had  
23 years of experience working with students, understood the mental health needs of children, and was  
24 eager to serve our school. However, because she did not hold the exact K-12 school counseling  
25 credential, she was required to enroll in an approved university program, take coursework, and meet  
26 credentialing requirements—even though she was qualified to teach those very university courses.

27 This bureaucratic hurdle delayed the time it took for a highly capable professional to step into a much-  
28 needed role in our school. Situations like this highlight the importance of flexibility, allowing schools to  
29 prioritize student needs while still ensuring high standards in counseling services.

#### 30 2. Alternative Methods to Serve Students (Section 5b)

# Milnor Public School District No. 2

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Milnor, North Dakota 58060-0369

Phone: 701-427-5237 | Fax: 701-427-5304

[www.milnor.k12.nd.us](http://www.milnor.k12.nd.us)

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Chris Larson, Superintendent and Activities Director

Ryan Weber, High School Principal

Theresa Wittich, Elementary Principal

Recognizing that hiring a full-time counselor is not always feasible, this bill **encourages practical alternatives** to meet students' needs, including:

- **Shared services agreements** with neighboring districts to maximize resources.
- **Contracted services** with licensed professionals to provide direct counseling support.
- **Virtual counseling options**, which have proven effective, particularly in remote areas.

These alternative methods **ensure that students continue to receive critical services** rather than leaving districts in a position where they are unable to meet counseling needs due to workforce shortages.

## **3. Accountability & Transparency (Section 5c & Section 6)**

This bill strengthens accountability by requiring schools to document their recruitment efforts and alternative strategies. Additionally, making this information available upon request promotes transparency and public trust in how districts are addressing student support services.

## **Conclusion**

House Bill 1449 is a balanced approach that maintains the high standard of school counseling services while providing districts the necessary flexibility to meet the needs of students when hiring challenges arise. By supporting this bill, we ensure that schools are not penalized for workforce shortages beyond their control while still prioritizing student access to academic, career, and mental health support.

I respectfully urge the committee to **support House Bill 1449**, as it **upholds our commitment to student well-being while recognizing the realities faced by North Dakota schools**.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Dr. Chris Larson  
Superintendent  
Milnor Public School  
[Chris.larson@k12.nd.us](mailto:Chris.larson@k12.nd.us)

Tiffany Meier

February 10, 2025

Subject: Testimony Regarding Bill 1449

My name is Tiffany Meier and I am a school counselor in rural North Dakota. This is my first year as a licensed school counselor. I finished my graduate program last April after a full year of interning underneath two astounding school counselors. During my time as an intern, I often was asking my school counselor supervisors and academic advisors if they knew of any job positions available because there were not many job openings listed in the state. I would look on the website we are directed to as college graduates, which I have attached for your knowledge: <https://www.edjobsnd.com/> . I also did regular searches online including Indeed, which I also have attached: <https://www.indeed.com/about> . To this day, I did not know that the school I am currently employed at even had an opening until I had a conversation with a coworker at my internship site. This coworker stated a relative mentioned the school needed one. After knowing the school I was searching for, then I was able to find the job opening on their school website. It was potentially posted elsewhere, however, it was not accessible through a search engine to my knowledge. I believe that this school is one example of what may be happening with these openings statewide. How is a school ever going to fill positions if said positions are not easily accessible?

As a graduate student, it was very difficult to listen to individuals discuss the large shortages within the school counseling field, but only be able to find a few openings across the state. I was trying to figure out my next steps in life, but this was putting it on pause. With this being said, it has all worked out for me and I was planning to be at this said school before I even finished graduate school. However, without the random coincidence of a coworker, their relative, and a five-minute conversation, I do not know if that would be true.

I understand that networking and having mentors on your side can be beneficial. In fact, I tell this to my high school students often. However, my mentors were also unaware of these open positions and not through lack of trying. This further proves that there is not public knowledge of what positions are currently available in each school district across the state. With this in mind, I do not know how the state would measure "a reasonable effort" for filling these vital positions knowing that in the past it was difficult to find the open positions to begin with. So instead of measuring this, maybe we need to figure out a way to make the school counseling positions more readily accessible to individuals entering the field. I urge you to oppose this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Tiffany Meier



## Testimony in Support of House Bill 1449

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1449, which seeks to reinforce the availability of school counselors for students across North Dakota. As the Executive Director of the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders, I strongly support this bill because it directly impacts the well-being and success of our students. We've been seeking to amend this section of code for the past couple sessions. This is the only section of century code that still has a ratio of how many positions we are to hire – each other position ratio has been redacted from code. We attempted to do the same with this position requirement by adjusting the definition of counselor to expand it to reflect the people we ARE hiring to fill the roles we need in our schools last session and the legislature did not have an appetite to do so. We do, however, have a severe counselor shortage and meeting that requirement is a physical impossibility and annually we are sent letters indicating we are outside of the law – and that is of no fault of the district.

For years, our school leaders have been advocating for enhanced student support services, particularly in mental health, career readiness, and personal development. The importance of school counselors in ensuring student success cannot be overstated. School counselors provide critical services, including academic advising, social-emotional support, crisis intervention, and career planning. However, as student needs have increased, our capacity to meet them has not kept pace.

## Why This Bill Matters:

### 1. Flexibility for School Districts

- House Bill 1449 recognizes the reality of staffing shortages by allowing districts to demonstrate **good faith efforts** in recruiting counselors and utilizing alternative methods, such as shared services or virtual counseling. This flexibility is essential for our rural and frontier schools that may struggle to fill these positions.

### 2. Transparency and Accountability

- The bill requires schools to document and share their efforts to meet counseling requirements. This ensures that student support remains a priority while allowing for practical solutions in meeting the need.

As educators and leaders, we know that students thrive when they feel supported. Investing in school counselors is an investment in **student success, workforce development, and stronger communities**. I urge you to **support House Bill 1449** to help ensure that every North Dakota student has the resources they need to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.



**NDSBA**  
NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOL  
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

1224 West Owens Avenue  
Bismarck ND 58501  
1-800-932-8791 • (701)255-4127  
[www.ndsba.org](http://www.ndsba.org)

**HB 1449**  
**Testimony of Amy De Kok**  
**House Education Committee**  
**February 11, 2025**

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Amy De Kok, and I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 168 public school districts and their governing boards. I am here today to express our support for HB 1449, which provides much-needed flexibility for school districts as they work to meet the state's school counselor requirements. This bill acknowledges the critical role school counselors play in supporting student success while also recognizing the significant challenges districts face in recruiting and retaining these essential professionals.

Under existing law, school districts must strive to employ one full-time counselor per 300 students in grades K-12. However, this requirement has become increasingly difficult to fulfill due to the persistent shortage of qualified school counselors in North Dakota. Many rural and small school districts, in particular, struggle to attract licensed counselors due to workforce shortages, geographic constraints, and financial limitations. These staffing challenges leave districts unable to comply fully with the statutory ratio, despite their best efforts.

HB 1449 introduces a pragmatic and necessary solution. By allowing school districts to meet the requirement through documented efforts to recruit and hire counselors, explore alternative methods such as shared services, contracted counseling, or virtual counseling options, and maintain records of these actions, the bill balances the need for student support with the reality of the hiring difficulties schools encounter. This approach ensures that school districts are held accountable for prioritizing student mental health while also providing them the flexibility needed to meet the law's intent in a manner that is practical and feasible.

This bill is not about diminishing the importance of school counselors—it is about ensuring that every district has a pathway to provide essential student support, even when a full-time hire is not immediately possible. By recognizing alternative methods and shared services, HB 1449 allows schools to be innovative in meeting student needs while maintaining transparency and accountability.

I urge this committee to support HB 1449 to help school districts navigate the ongoing challenges of filling school counselor positions while continuing to prioritize the well-being and success of North Dakota students.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

# 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

## Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1449  
2/17/2025

Relating to school counselor position requirements.
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9:02 a.m. Chairman Heinert called the meeting to order.

Members Present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck, Representatives, Conmy, Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Marchall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

Members absent: Representative Heilman

### Discussion Topics:

- Committee Action

9:07 a.m. Representative Hauck moved a Do Not Pass.

9:08 a.m. Representative Hager seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Pat D. Heinert	Y
Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck	Y
Representative Liz Conmy	AB
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Dori Hauck	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	AB
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Roger A. Maki	Y
Representative Andrew Marschall	AB
Representative Desiree Morton	Y
Representative Anna S. Novak	AB
Representative Doug Osowski	Y

Motion Carried: 10-0-4

Bill Carrier: Representative Hauck

9:09 a.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

*Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk*

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE**  
**HB 1449 ([25.1194.01000](#))**

**Education Committee (Rep. Heinert, Chairman)** recommends **DO NOT PASS** (10 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 4 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1449 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.