

1 HB1035 – DJS – Relating to the Uniform Juvenile Court Act

2 Mandan Public Schools – Carly Retterath Testimony

3 Good morning Chairman Klemin and members of the Judiciary committee. For the record, my
4 name is Carly Retterath. I am the Alternative Education Director for Mandan Public Schools. I
5 am here today to urge you to give HB 1365 a Do Pass recommendation.

6 Three years ago, representatives from DJS approached Mandan Public Schools about a pilot
7 project they wanted to implement for at-risk youth. Their idea was a school within a school that
8 would provide wrap around services for students to keep them in school and out of the court
9 system. After a few months of planning, we implemented the “Next Step” program in both
10 Mandan High School and Mandan Middle School in the fall of 2019. Through this partnership we
11 have more than doubled our capacity at our alternative high school by expanding to include
12 multiple sessions in a day. We hired, family liaisons, teachers, paraprofessionals and we worked
13 with community partners to ensure we could provide students the services they needed to be
14 successful.

15 This program has been an overwhelming success. In nine of the last eleven school years Mandan
16 High School lost an average of 22.2 students from school between the start of school and January
17 25th. These students dropped out of school for varying reasons. Life is difficult, but without a
18 high school diploma, the odds of a student becoming a successful and productive member of
19 society drop considerably. With the Next Step program and an expanded alternative high school,
20 we have cut those numbers in half. In the last two years we have lost an average of 11.1 students
21 in the same time period.

22 Another unintended benefit of the program is the spider effect that it has had on students in the
23 general population of Mandan High School and Mandan Middle School. These students have been
24 able to access services offered through the program to help them navigate school and life. In
25 addition, the funds from DJS have allowed the district to provide professional development to staff
26 that has had positive impacts that have extended beyond the Next Step program.

27 Mandan School does have two School Resource Officers that work in all eight of our school
28 buildings. Because of the relationships that we are able to build with students in the Next Step
29 program and behavioral supports we provide our SRO's involvement in the program has been
30 minimal.

31 Setting up a school within a school and having the supports in place to build relationships with
32 students to find out what they need to be successful is grounded in research and it is best practice.
33 Investing dollars on the front end to allow us to meet student needs so they can stay in school and
34 be successful will pay big dividends when students graduate high school and become productive
35 citizens in our society.

36 I urge you to give HB 1365 a DO PASS recommendation. I would be happy to stand for any
37 questions.