

TESTIMONY ON HB 1466
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
March 10, 2021
By: Dr. Janelle Ferderer, Director
South Central Prairie Special Education Unit
701-745-2971

Chairperson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Janelle Ferderer. I have been an educator and practitioner in Early Childhood Education for 32 years. I am currently the Director of Special Education for the South Central Prairie Special Education Unit, serving 11 rural school districts in south central North Dakota. I am providing testimony today in opposition of HB 1466.

On its face, this bill could appear to provide an opportunity for early childhood programs to receive grant funding. The best in class grant program is modeled after Alabama's First Class Voluntary Pre-K (FCVPK) program. Funding for FCVPK is distributed by the Alabama Education Trust Fund Budget through competitive grants at three levels for pre-K programs, and inflexible requirements must be met in order to receive funding. While the Alabama model may have some merit, it is not a model that can be rubber stamped on North Dakota. The implications should be examined more closely by stakeholders before passing.

This bill appears to encapsulate all funding currently associated with early childhood programs to pay administrative staff to manage a best in class grant program and set forth the requirements any program would have to meet in in order to receive any type of funding under this bill. With a current estimate of \$4.8 million, only 20 programs would receive this grant over

a biennium. There are currently 59 programs receiving some type of funding through the Department of Commerce grants, which are based on income levels of families. This funding would become part of the best in class grant fund and many districts would lose what little they now receive.

Given the diversity of needs across our state, what may be feasible for one school district, may be nearly impossible in another. The Department of Human services would set the standard for approving programs and determining which ones would receive funding. Requirements such as maintaining recommended group size, professional development requirements, and the recapturing of funds from programs not “adhering to expectations set forth by the department” have implications that could supersede local control of these programs.

Collaboration between agencies, departments and stakeholders, in the form of a study to determine how this bill would affect children and families in all North Dakota communities would be a reasonable step before such a change is made.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for your time.