

Mark Heinert

Assistant Executive Director, Youthworks

Testimony in support of SB 2258

Senate Human Services Committee

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Chairman Lee and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mark Heinert, and I am here today to deliver testimony in support of SB 2258. I have been a licensed social worker in North Dakota for 30 years, serving runaway and homeless youth for the last 24. I am the Assistant Executive Director at Youthworks, a private, non-profit, youth serving agency serving Runaway and Homeless Youth in North Dakota. I am also the current president of the Missouri Valley Coalition for Homeless People, Inc.

I support SB 2258, which would eliminate barriers to birth certificates by allowing people experiencing homelessness to get a birth certificate with only one form of ID (that can include a letter from a service provider) and allow unaccompanied homeless youth under 18 to get their own birth certificate. Homeless youth and parents often need basic vital documents like a birth certificate to access employment, education, health, housing, and other needed services. The current process to get a birth certificate leads to a catch-22: people need a birth certificate to get an ID, and an ID to get a birth certificate. This challenge is one of the most common barriers that Youthworks sees young people experience that prevents them from

obtaining their goals. SB 2258 will eliminate this problem while adequately protecting against identity theft.

SB 2258 also makes sure that youth who are no longer staying with their parents can access their birth certificates. Youthworks serves over 100 youth each year who are runaway or homeless and are under the age of 18. Currently, ND law allows vital records to be issued to individuals who are at least sixteen years old. SB 2258 would ensure this is not a barrier for youth who need a birth certificate to get a job or access education, housing, or other services. Better access to birth certificates will help homeless youth access basic services and benefits, keeping them safer and healthier, which will empower them to access education and employment that can end their homelessness.

This bill, along with SB 2265 were the result of listening sessions with homeless youth across the state of North Dakota. They have shared what have been barriers to their success, and I ask you today to help reduce one of these barriers by voting in favor of SB 2258.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions at: 701-255-6909 or  
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