

Testimony
Engrossed Senate Bill 2147
House Education Committee
Representative Mark Owens, Chairman
March 10, 2021

Chairman Owens, and members of the House Education Committee, I am Cory Pedersen, Director for the Department of Human Services' (Department), Children and Family Services Division. I am here today in support of Engrossed Senate Bill 2147.

This bill proposes to amend and reenact sections 15.1-21-2.2 and 15.1-21-2.3 of North Dakota Century Code chapters 50-06 and 50-11 relating to high school graduation and curriculum requirements.

The Children and Families Services Division serves families who experience a range of challenges, including parental substance abuse or mental health issues, loss of employment and/or housing, and domestic violence. In addition to struggling with these broader family-based crises, children affected by instability in their family may also struggle in school. Experience has shown us that maintaining educational success in the midst of significant family disruption can be difficult for children.

Some of the children who may benefit from the added flexibility proposed in Engrossed Senate Bill 2147 include those children served by the department, including children who are receiving in-home services or may be placed with a guardian, in foster care, or an adoptive placement. Instability in the family setting contributes to the academic struggles children may encounter; as students they get behind and may not be able to stay on track to earn enough credits to graduate timely, if at all.

By giving the school district or nonpublic school the ability to develop eligibility criteria or programmatic requirements to allow a passing score on the relevant portions of the GED to receive credit for the corresponding graduation requirements, these children will have a better opportunity for success, which can contribute to lower risk of drop-out and higher propensity to graduate, which will in turn help this already at-risk group of children have a greater chance at success as adults.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.