



Testimony Prepared for the  
**House Judiciary Committee**

By: *Tamara Uselman, Director of Equity & Inclusion*  
*Fargo Public Schools, Fargo ND*

**RE: House Bill 1035 – Juvenile Justice System Improvements**

Chair Senator Diane Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. For the record, I am Tamara Uselman, Ed.D., and I am presenting this testimony in support of House Bill 1035.

Much of the last few years of my life has been spent extensively researching the reasons behind, fiscal notes, and negative personal and social impacts of the school-to-prison pipeline. My research included both national and state (ND and MN) data bases. I commend ND for its efforts in this Bill which stands to improve outcomes for youth and their families, public safety, and the taxpayers' return on investment! House Bill 1035 is the current best plan to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

Specifically, this bill holds opportunity to further improve ND's juvenile code, as follows:

- A. Ensures North Dakota's juvenile justice code is updated and reflective of current research, developmental science, and best practices, shown to protect public safety and improve youth outcomes; and
- B. Establishes development of policies and practices tailored to meet the differentiated needs of youth who are deprived, unruly, or delinquent, rather than treating them all as one. I am excited to see legislation that creates separate chapters for guardianship, child in need of services (aka "unruly") and child in need of protection (aka "deprived"). Separate chapters provide clarity around definitions, availability of different sanctions, clear vision to the purpose and goals of the overall statute, and likelihood for positive outcomes when responses can be tailored to specific categories of need;
- C. Recognition that low-risk youth, based on a valid and reliable risk assessment as well as Children in Need of Services (CHINS), are less likely to recidivate and more likely to graduate when diverted from enmeshment with the juvenile justice system toward system of care. Herein, the Bill shows promise to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline;

- D. Supports partnerships of students, parents, schools, and other agencies to provide services that meet the needs of youth who show signs of behavioral struggles;
- E. Ensures the American right to counsel at key decision points;
- F. Restricts and likely reduces the use of out of home placement due to lack of better options by providing community-based services. Youth do better when treatment happens close to home. Families struggling economically continue to connect with youth when youth remain in the community rather than hundreds of miles away; and
- G. Offers each agency time to implement the massive improvements in services via a co-labor process policy and procedure development. Such collaboration is a commonsense, hallmark of North Dakota.

In closing, thank you so much for your time and attention regarding this Bill; the significance of it cannot be understated. This Bill stands to create conditions that benefit ND youth, schools, families, taxpayers, and communities.

Senator Larson and the Senate Judiciary Committee, on behalf of Fargo Public Schools, **I support a Do Pass recommendation on House Bill 1035.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tamara Uselman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Tamara J. Uselman, Ed.D.  
Director of Equity & Inclusion  
Fargo Public Schools, Fargo ND