

Testimony
Senate Bill 2371 – Department of Human Services
Senate Education Committee
Senator Layton W. Freborg, Chairman
February 6, 2007

Chairman Freborg and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Paul Ronningen; I am the Director of the Children and Family Services Division of the Department of Human Services. I'm here today to offer testimony in opposition to Section 1 of the bill before you, SB 2371.

When faced with situations where we must remove a child from their home because of safety concerns, the court places the child in the care, custody and control of an agency, typically a county social services agency. As a custodian, under current North Dakota law (NDCC 27-20-38) the Department of Human Services is given the right, and the duty, to make decisions regarding the child, specifically educational decisions. The Department works closely with foster parents and others as a team to make the best and most informed decisions for the children in our custody. We already have many options for special services to address educational issues that a foster child may have.

Section 1 of this bill clearly gives foster parents, with the permission of the Department of Human Services, the opportunity to provide home education to a child. The decision to offer home education is a decision best made by a parent, not by a custodial agency. The options available for public school education are, and have always been, sufficient to meet the needs of children in foster care. Foster parents already assume a great deal of responsibility for providing day-to-day care for children in their homes; providing education in addition to all the other

responsibilities would be beyond the role we currently expect from our foster parents. Foster children benefit from the opportunities to be educated in an atmosphere that give them the maximum social benefits to build both peer-to-peer relationships and relationships with the various professionals who guide their education. Therefore, with all due respect, we oppose Section 3 of 15.1-23-01, found in Section 1 of SB 2371.

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