

January 20, 2021

Good Afternoon Chairman Weisz and members of the Human Services committee. I am Brandi Hardy. I am the Legislative Coordinator for the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition (NDHRC).

Today I am here to state the NDHRC's position on HB 1317 will remain neutral as long as sentences 13 - 15 are removed in which it states, "**The payment of reasonable fees directly incurred by a married couple who are members of the opposite sex for an adoption of a newborn which occurs under subdivision a.**"

This language is discriminatory against couples of the opposite sex who are unwed; same-sex couples; and single individuals who are ready to become parents. NDHRC believes that the children of ND deserve families that provide a safe, nurturing, and loving home to grow up in.

Sentences 13 - 15 imply a loving home can be created ONLY by a married couple of the opposite and eliminates so many potential families for these children. In her written testimony provided to this committee, Rachel Thomason, an adoption attorney, states that this language would deny at least half of the adoption clients she works with because of their marital status or sexual orientation.

Additionally, denying potential parents access to financial assistance for their adoption journey, it can create an ethical dilemma for professionals. I spoke with Kristin Rubbelke, the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers of North Dakota Chapter (NASW-ND). During our conversation and in her written testimony she has provided the committee, she states, "... its denial of the pregnant individual's right to self-determination. The NASW Code of Ethics supports the inherent dignity and worth of the individuals, which means giving the individuals 'the opportunity to change and address their own needs.'"

I also spoke with Sue Grundysen, the Program Director of Adoption Services through the Village Family Services Center. She too provided written testimony for the committee. You will notice in her testimony she outlines two main concerns about HB 1317. They include coercion and again, discrimination.

Today, I also have the privilege to introduce you to two amazing women to share their stories with the committee today. Reverend Grace Murray is a pastor and teacher of People's United Church of Christ in Fargo and her Daughter Elizabeth Dill, who goes by the name Sage.

Chairman Weisz and committee members, I encourage you to remove sentences 13 - 15 from HB 1317.

Thank you.

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