

Good afternoon, Chairman Weisz and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Tracy Miller, PhD, and I am the State Epidemiologist at the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). I am here today to testify in opposition of House Bill 1348.

In July, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) collaborated on a wastewater sampling project with the Department of Environmental Quality and North Dakota State University. The purpose behind this project was to conduct additional COVID-19 surveillance during a time of limited human testing options and then identify areas in the state that may benefit from additional community-wide testing events.

Regardless of the disease, the benefits to wastewater testing include:

- Providing a pooled community sample to help identify illness in areas where testing is limited or mass testing is not an option.
- Nearly 80% of United States households are served by municipal sewage collection systems.
- Detection in sewage serves as an indicator that is independent of health care-seeking behaviors and access to clinical testing.

The following link provides additional information specific to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID-19 wastewater project:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/wastewater-surveillance.html

Although this type of testing is new for COVID-19, wastewater testing has been successfully used as a method for early detection of other diseases, such as polio, cryptosporidium and giardia. It can also be used to test for heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury, and lead.

Data collected in wastewater does not identify individual cases, nor should it be the sole source in determining an increase or decrease of mitigation measures. For example, wastewater data alone would not be used to determine travel restrictions, closing of businesses, or implementing/removing measures

such as mask mandates. It is one tool that provides information to help monitor illness in a community, track trends in a community, and help determine if additional measures may be needed.

For these reasons, we ask you to oppose the passage of House Bill 1348. This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.