

I strongly urge the North Dakota legislation to oppose this bill. It is crucial that minors have the ability to deny a parent or guardian being in their exam room for any reason. Minors deserve privacy. Full stop. Robbing minors of the ability to undergo a private examination robs them of autonomy and of the ability to report potential abuse, especially if the parent/guardian present is the one guilty of said abuse. If parents/guardians are allowed to stay in the examination room regardless of the child's wishes, an abused child is forced to choose between staying silent about said abuse and potentially being abused in retaliation for speaking up with the abuser present. Even in cases where the minor is not being abused, they may simply be uncomfortable with the prospect of their parent/guardian being present, especially in the case of exams relating to sexual health.

In my own experience, I disclosed sexual abuse at the age of 17 and was subsequently given a pelvic exam at the Red River Children's Advocacy Center. I was able to choose to exclude my mother from the room during this examination. If I had been unable to do so, the exam would have been exponentially more traumatizing than it already was. It is for these reasons that I urge the North Dakota state legislature to oppose this bill and protect our state's minors.