

Opposition HB 1450

North Dakota Senate Human Services Committee

March 17, 2025

Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services committee my name is Kristie Wolff, and I am the Communications Coordinator for Central Dakota Forensic Nurse Examiners (CDFNE).

CDFNE is a North Dakota based non-profit organization providing forensic medical services to children and adult survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence, physical abuse and neglect in western North Dakota. Our organization serves 23 counties, with our headquarters in Bismarck. Our team Forensic Nurses work with a variety of partners to ensure that victims receive comprehensive, coordinated care while supporting the investigation and prosecution of crimes.

While we recognize the intent of this bill, we have significant concerns about its unintended consequences—particularly for victims of human trafficking, neglect, and abuse.

Gaps in Exceptions

Currently, while exceptions for suspected sexual and physical abuse exist in the bill, those same exceptions do not exist for trafficking and neglect. Because these offenses are separately defined in North Dakota Century Code, we are concerned that youth experiencing trafficking or neglect would not have the protections outlined in the bill under section 3.

Impact on Forensic Medical Care

Under existing North Dakota law, forensic medical care can be administered, including evidence collection, to older teens who have experienced sexual violence without parental consent, provided reasonable steps have been taken to notify the parent or guardian. Again, although there are

exceptions for physical and sexual abuse, access to forensic medical care can include survivors of human trafficking or dating violence. This flexibility is crucial. It can be difficult for a survivor to work up the courage to report their abuse or seek care. If a survivor would need to leave without receiving care because we can't get in contact with a parent or guardian and provide the parent with the information required by the language in the bill, the likelihood of the survivor returning is not high. If they do return, the delay may mean critical evidence is lost. We are deeply concerned that the language in this bill could override our ability to provide timely forensic medical care to some survivors.

Unintended Consequences of Power Dynamics

Despite the bill's intent, we believe it may unintentionally reinforce the very power dynamics that perpetuate abuse. Frequently an abusive parent or guardian will maintain an unhealthy level of control which can include constant surveillance. By using policy to create an environment where the parent has full and total control of the conversations a minor has and if or when they receive privacy in a medical setting, there is a risk of further solidifying this power dynamic—effectively handing an abuser another tool to maintain control. This is not about undermining the role of a parent; we fully support and encourage a parent's role in medical care. This is simply about the safety of children.

Additionally, another unintended consequence this policy could have is allowing abusers to coach their victims. When parents are provided with a list of potential oral or written questions in advance, it creates an opportunity for an abusive parent to dictate how the child responds and prevent questions on certain topics from being asked altogether.

The protection and well-being of minors—especially those in dangerous situations—must remain a priority. Therefore, I am asking you to give a DO NOT PASS recommendation on HB 1450.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Kristie Wolff

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