

Senate Judiciary Committee
HB 1511
Monday March 17, 2025

Chair Larson and Committee Members, I am Dr Collette Lessard, a board-certified physician in Obstetrics and Gynecology. I have been practicing for nearly 12 years and have spent my entire career in Grand Forks, North Dakota. I am also writing as the Legislative Chair for the North Dakota section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

I am writing in opposition of HB 1511. Many OBGYN physicians across our state have concerns with the amendments in this bill.

First, this bill is about creating an educational video about sections of a state law that have been deemed unconstitutional and are currently not in effect.

This bill also specifically excludes other health care practitioners from performing abortions outside of the specialty of Obstetrics. There are Family Practice physicians that have training in providing medical and surgical abortions and it is within their scope of practice to do so. In our rural state of North Dakota, we already have a maternity care desert, and we rely upon Family Practice physicians to help expand our access for obstetrics to all corners of the state. Passing this bill will again worsen our access to care and perpetuate the maternity care deserts in our state. According to national statistics from 2023, 71.7% of counties in North Dakota are considered maternal care deserts. Women in North Dakota already have a very high vulnerability to adverse outcomes due to the limited availability of reproductive healthcare services. Passing this bill would worsen this.

These amendments are again another example of government interference with the practice of medicine. We are upheld to medical, educational, and ethical standards as physicians. The North Dakota Board of Medicine monitors and upholds physicians to stay in line with these standards. We are also required on an annual basis by the American Board of Obstetricians and Gynecologists to complete educational modules to maintain OBGYN board certification. Requiring OBGYN physicians to watch an educational video created by the state government on abortion adds nothing to our physician competency. This is another process of our state government trying to be involved in and interfere with women's healthcare. There are no other medical specialties in our state required to watch a video, created by the government, on a procedure that they are skilled and trained in.

Another concern I have goes back to the debate with prior abortion bills about "what constitutes a medical emergency"? Which diagnosis is enough for a physician who is not an Obstetrician or who is not up to date on the educational video to be able to perform an abortion to a woman and be considered a medical emergency? Do her vital signs need to be abnormal? Does she need to be septic with an infection? Does she need to be suffering from end organ failure or in the intensive care unit? There are criminal charges associated with not complying with this.

In summary, abortion is a component of comprehensive women's health care. OBGYN physicians are skilled in and sufficiently trained in all aspects of women's health care and we already comply with regulatory board requirements to be sure that we are practicing evidence-based medicine. The state government posing additional restrictions does nothing to improve safety for women in our state. These regulations only make the practice of medicine more confusing and pose fear amongst providers that they are going to break a law while providing compassionate quality healthcare for their

patients. Passing HB 1511 will worsen our maternity care desert in North Dakota by further restricting access to women's health care. Considering that there are no "abortion facilities" in our state and OBGYNs only practice at hospitals in our state, these laws will be directly impacting women with pregnancy complications. This adds further emotional distress and potential health risks to already devastating diagnoses and pregnancy circumstances.

I am strongly urging you to give a "do not pass" to HB 1511.

Respectfully,

Collette Lessard, MD, FACOG