

Dr. Tom Hutchens
Testimony in Opposition to HB 1511
Senate Judiciary Committee
March 17, 2025

Chair Larson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tom Hutchens. I was a practicing OB/GYN in North Dakota for more than 33 years and I retired in 2020. I came to North Dakota when the United States Air Force sent me to Minot in 1983. I lived and practiced in North Dakota since. Prior to coming to North Dakota, I attended Emory University School of Medicine and did my residency in San Antonio at Wilford Hall. In 1987, we moved to Bismarck and I joined Bob Bury. I was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and AOA. I have always been in good standing with the North Dakota Medical Association.

I am voicing my strong opposition to HB 1511. I can assure the committee that OB/GYNs in North Dakota are well trained professionals who provide excellent care to their patients. This bill implies that these doctors are confused or in need of education on North Dakota's abortion laws. It is not the lack of training or aptitude of North Dakota physicians that is bringing this law about. Many of my colleagues have expressed to me the frustration and fear the laws around which this education is aimed have caused them in their practice, when they are simply attempting to provide necessary care to their patients. It is not the fault of the physicians that North Dakota's law is unclear.

The problems with the law are legal in nature, and I do not see how a continuing education course is going to fix those issues. The Courts are in process of resolving the confusion, and this proposed law serves no purpose.

In particular, I oppose the "25 years of practice" requirement. It is arbitrary, and any implication that doctors with less than that amount of experience possess less knowledge and skill is nonsense. Also, the requirement for annual training is equally non-sensical. Doctors are well aware of the laws that regulate their profession. The problem is not in a lack of awareness, but in the lack of clarity of what the law prohibits in terms of emergency care. To put in place a law requiring annual education implies that there is a problem with awareness or education and that simply is not the case.

Please recommend a do not pass on this pointless legislation.