

Chairperson Weisz and members of the committee,

My name is Kristin Rubbelke and I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers North Dakota Chapter (NASW-ND). On behalf of NASW-ND, thank you for reading and considering our position on HB1317.

NASW-ND opposes HB 1317 as written due to discriminatory language that could prohibit family members and others from adopting.

For those seeking adoption, language in HB 1317 is discriminatory as it only permits financial support to the pregnant individual if they choose married, same sex couples as the parents for their child. Social workers support keeping a child within the family and/or culture whenever possible. The language of the proposed bill excludes an individual from choosing their widowed mother as the adoptive parent, or brother who is not yet married, or best friend who has tried to conceive but cannot. Denial of financial assistance under HB 1317 for these reasons creates a barrier of choice for pregnant individuals seeking adoption for their child.

Coincidentally, it also creates discriminatory practices for those seeking to adopt. Single parents, unwed couples (same and opposite sex), and same-sex couples and families headed by same-sex couples deserve the protections available to opposite-sex married couples in North Dakota.

Furthermore, language presented in HB 1317 poses ethical dilemmas for social workers—not only in its discriminatory language but also in its denial of the pregnant individual's right to self-determination. The NASW Code of Ethics supports the inherent dignity and worth of the individual, which means giving the individual "the opportunity to change and address their own needs." The inherent purpose of the bill is to create financial support in cases where individuals are deciding to make their baby available for adoption. Accordingly, the current language is counterproductive, and would limit options for adoption.

Therefore, NASW-ND supports changing the language to indicate that pregnant individuals are able to choose from all family types without financial repercussion.