



NDSBA
NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOL
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

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HB 1377

**Testimony of Amy DeKok
House Human Services Committee
January 25, 2021**

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee, my name is Amy DeKok. I am in-house Legal Counsel for the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 178 North Dakota public school districts and their boards. NDSBA stands in opposition to HB 1377.

Our schools serve arguably the most vulnerable population of citizens. Parents entrust their children to our schools to protect them and keep them safe from harm, especially preventable harm. If passed, HB 1377 will make it even more difficult for schools to keep kids safe and protected. School immunization requirements play an important role in increasing immunization rates and ensuring environments where children congregate are safe.

North Dakota already has one of the most relaxed school immunization policies in the country. North Dakota allows medical, religious, and moral/philosophical exemptions. Parents simply have to sign a document prior to school entry to claim a religious, moral/philosophical exemption. North Dakota is only one of 15 states that still allows moral/philosophical exemptions; many of the other states that allow philosophical exemptions require a notary signature or education from a healthcare provider prior to claiming such an exemption. Five states only allow medical exemptions and do not offer religious or philosophical exemptions. If HB 1377 were to pass, this would give parents yet another basis for an exemption and would further relax the already liberal school vaccination requirements. Additional exemptions are simply not necessary.

According to data from the ND Department of Health, North Dakota kindergarten exemption rates have increased most years. This past school year, personal belief (philosophical, religious) exemption rates were 3.91% (395 children). Up from 3.60% the previous year. Since the 2007-2008 school year, a 240 percent increase in exemptions has been reported in North Dakota. HB 1377, if passed, would continue and likely increase this dangerous trend.

NDSBA urges a Do Not Pass recommendation on HB 1377, and I would be happy to stand for any questions. Thank you.