

**Testimony in support of HB 1465 – Giving Patients Freedom of Choice in Health Care
February 3, 2021**

Good morning Chairman Weisz and Members of the Committee:

For the record my name is Michael Greenwood, I am a Cataract, Refractive, Cornea, and Glaucoma surgeon at Vance Thompson Vision in West Fargo, ND. I grew up in Jamestown, ND and attended the University of North Dakota for undergraduate and medical school. My residency training was at Case Western Reserve University, and my fellowship at Vance Thompson Vision in Sioux Falls, SD. My goal was to come back to North Dakota, and provide specialty care to the people who raised me and offer services that weren't readily available in the region, so that they could avoid long trips to access specialty care. I have been in practice here in West Fargo since 2016. I am writing to testify in support of House Bill 1465, which will give patients freedom in choosing their provider for health care.

The Importance of Patient Choice

Patients have the freedom to choose the date and time of their appointment and also get to choose whether or not to undergo certain treatments, but they DO NOT always have the freedom to choose WHO they will be seeing for these appointments and treatments. Currently, many patients are forced to use providers in insurance company networks or pay extra, and some are required to undergo unnecessary travel at their own expense.

Giving patients freedom of choice will allow families to see doctors and other medical providers they know and trust. Patients will be able to be cared for by providers who fit their personal goals and values. In fact, just this morning our office saw a patient who needed cataract surgery although they had no benefits with us since someone in his network could perform cataract surgery. This patient, however, wanted to come to us as we are able to offer special intraocular lenses that can reduce or eliminate the need for glasses following cataract surgery. By coming to us, that patient will have to pay for all of his visits and care out of pocket, but he was able to choose the type of surgery and outcomes that fit his goals. An expense he could afford, but many cannot.

Freedom of choice allows patients to see specialists who are more familiar with certain disease processes. This reduces diagnostic errors which in turn reduces unnecessary re-testing by providers not familiar with these cases. This saves time and money for the patient, and obviously provides better care. A patient was recently denied seeing me for a specific corneal disease (I am 1 of 3 fellowship trained cornea specialists in the state), stating an in-network provider could see the patient, and listed a couple of options. The ophthalmologists listed are great people and doctors, but one was a retina specialist, and the other a glaucoma specialist. These doctors are very skilled, but not for what this patient needs. And it is also very likely that these doctors don't want to see this kind of patient. That is why they specialize in something else! This is not what is best for the patient and certainly not standard of care.

There are also cost savings for the patient. Freedom of choice will ease travel burdens and would increase competition, helping control spiraling medical costs. It may also work to eliminate out-of-network expenses to patients. My colleagues and I have countless stories of hearing of patients who have travelled out of state to receive equivalent care that they could have received locally and without all of the extra time off work and cost of travel including overnight stays. And unfortunately, we learn of these cases after the fact and are unable to help these patients and support the local community. Additionally, our neighbors Minnesota and South Dakota, have similar laws in place which allows their patients to seek care locally and not leave the state.

The above are just a few examples from 1 surgeon at 1 practice, but this happens to patients every single day across the state. Giving patients the freedom of choice allows them to have a voice. Patients should be able to choose who they want to see based on relationships, comfort, and qualifications. It should not be dictated by what insurance you have.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee, for your time and consideration this morning and I ask the Committee for a DO PASS recommendation on House Bill 1465