



Senate Government and Veterans Affairs Committee

SB 2331

February 5, 2021

Chairman Vedaa and Committee Members, I am Courtney Koebele, the Executive Director of the North Dakota Medical Association. The North Dakota Medical Association is the professional membership organization for North Dakota physicians, residents, and medical students.

NDMA is opposed to SB 2331. NDMA has concerns about making the state health officer an elected position. Many physicians who would be excellent health officers don't have political interests, experience or skills. Public health, like other health professions, requires a life-time commitment and focus to acquire and maintain expertise. Having to engage in the politics of elections would greatly detract from the time required to focus on the ever-changing science of public health.

Making such a position elected, rather than appointed, changes the essence of the role of a physician. In doing so, he or she now becomes by definition, a politician. This includes campaigns, vetting by political groups based not on expertise, but on pre-election scenarios that may bear little resemblance to the at-hand and ever-changing public health decisions required during one's tenure. Concepts of election and constituency have the potential to sway focus away from medical expertise and best-practice.

Public health must be neutral and be freed as much as possible from politics to effectively and honestly address the health issues of North Dakota. An elected health officer even if non-partisan would bring the politics associated with election processes into the functions of the department to the detriment of the public's health.

We recommend, for the well-being of the citizens of North Dakota, that the State Health Officer remain an appointed physician and not a political figure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.