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Kristie Wolff – Executive Director, North Dakota Women's Network

Support HB 1105

North Dakota Senate Human Services Committee

Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, my name is Kristie Wolff, I am the Executive Director of the North Dakota Women's Network.

North Dakota Women's Network is a statewide organization with members and advocates from every corner of the state. Based on our mission to improve the lives of women, I am testifying in support of HB 1105.

I believe we can all agree on the clear benefits of breastfeeding for both mom and baby, so I'm going to take a more personal approach to my testimony.

I was shamed for breastfeeding my children. My children's father said he was ok with me breastfeeding during my pregnancy, but I soon found out he was ok with it, as long he did not have to see it, or others did not see it. To him being discreet about breastfeeding meant being out of sight. Examples:

- Shortly after giving birth to my first son I was told I could not breastfeed at the table during meals.
- I was reprimanded for breastfeeding in the car in the mall parking lot.

My intention was to breastfeed my boys for six months each, however because of lack of support, breastfeeding became stressful. I lost my milk at 5 weeks with my first son and six weeks with my second son. I felt like I had failed my boys.

So how does this bill tie into my story when it was happening in my home? My personal experience has helped me understand that there are individuals who think being discreet about breastfeeding means being out of sight. Sharing my personal story has also opened the door to others sharing their story with me, some who have experienced public shaming. HB 1105 sends a clear message, breastfeeding is not indecent. This helps change the conversation. It is a piece of the puzzle that will help eliminate stigma and shaming and empower women be successful at breastfeeding.

I want touch on one last point. I took the time to reach out to local law enforcement on the language in the current law and the proposed language in HB 1105. I spoke with someone in a

supervisory role at each location. I want to clarify that I did not ask anyone to take a stance on the bill and no one did take a stance on the bill. The individuals I spoke with did not see the full bill, our conversations were based on me reading section 23-12-16 Right to breastfeed to them followed by me asking what enforcement would look like for an officer. There was a common theme, subjective language makes an officer's job harder. Having clear language prevents the officer from also trying to interpret the language. Clear language also creates consistency, as each officer may interpret subjective language differently.

The current breastfeeding language in ND Century Code is subjective, the language in HB 1105 is very clear, breastfeeding is not indecent exposure.

So, today I am asking you to give a DO PASS recommendation to HB 1105, and send a clear message that North Dakota supports breastfeeding.

Thank you,
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