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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Traill District Health Unit

03/30/2021

67th Legislative Assembly
Senate Political Subdivisions Committee

Re: HB 1323

Chairman Senator Burckhard and Committee Members,

My name is Brenda Stallman, RN, Administrator of Traill District Health Unit, located in Hillsboro. Thank you for considering my testimony in opposition of HB 1323.

I am sure everyone in the room and those listening online would agree that we are extremely tired of Covid-19. We are tired of hearing about it, we are tired of living with restrictions, we are tired of worrying about our loved ones, and I can assure you that those of us who work in public health are extremely tired of the long hard hours trying to stop the spread of it. But we remain engaged and committed to bring Covid to an end so we all can work, congregate, and enjoy life in a safe manner with our families and friends.

North Dakota public health has historically responded to many different threats to our citizens' health. Each has required the use of different strategies that have been researched and recommended by top disease experts who have spent lifetimes applying scientific principles for the best outcomes for our population.

In my personal public health experience spanning 30 years, I have responded to Hepatitis A by going door to door drawing blood samples and administering vaccinations to a multitude of people considered at risk. During the flood of 97, I took my newborn son out and administered tetanus vaccinations to flood responders. I have been out and collected dead birds for testing for West Nile Virus, which is transmitted from mosquitos to birds and humans. Elsewhere in ND, a train derailment in 2002 in Minot and resulting ammonia spill called for immediate public health response. Stay at home and boil water orders were implemented by public health. Respiratory assessments of those impacted, and water sample analysis to determine the environmental impact all were at the hands of public health.

And now we are one year into a global pandemic that has resulted in over 500,000 deaths in the U.S. alone. As with each of the previously mentioned public health events, we are called upon to use the tools researched and proven to be the best-known methods for responding to and stopping the spread of this devastating virus. To achieve success, it takes a collection of practices used consistently by everyone to bring Covid to an end. Social distancing, contact tracing, hand washing, universal mask use, and now vaccinations are all necessary to make this happen. It wasn't

until we had a statewide mask mandate finally put in place, did we start to see a significant decline in Covid-19 cases. This is because prior partial and inconsistent use of prescribed mitigation measures did not have the desired outcome.

It would be ineffective for a fireman to fight a fire with a hose that has holes in it. My husband is an electrician and relies on a voltage tester for assurance of his safety when working with wires. We wouldn't think of taking away these tools that are so important for them to do their work safely and effectively. I believe that everyone listening or reading this testimony strives to do the best job they can do in their given careers with the research, technology, and practices proven to be the most productive. Just as farmers use science-based research to reduce pest invasions of their crops, enhance soil health, and increase yields; and ranchers rely on vaccinations and nutrient rich feed to improve the viability and health of their livestock, public health relies on science-proven methods to reduce disease and improve the health of our citizens.

Mask mandates are an inexpensive, yet an effective and critical component of managing a highly infectious disease spread by respiratory droplets like Covid-19. A disease spread largely by people who are asymptomatic and unaware they are carriers of the virus and yet, in absence of a mask, run a high risk of infecting our most vulnerable citizens. By terminating our ability to implement important public health measures such as a mask mandate, our efforts are significantly impaired, and we are going to be less effective in our ability to do our work. This would be an unfortunate precedent that gives a green light to other impeding legislation that would have a negative impact on our state's public health.

I urge you to consider voting no on HB 1323.

Brenda Stallman, RN, Administrator
Traill District Health Unit, Hillsboro