

WRITTEN PRESENTATION OF

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NORTH DAKOTA

POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS COMMITTEE

April 1st, 2021

**By: William Jorgensen; Teacher,
Interventionist at Eight Mile School District
6, Trenton North Dakota**

I want to thank the Committee, and Brad Bekkedahl, my Senator from Williston for giving me this opportunity to testify before you regarding House Bill 1323. After 3 ½ years of teaching in Fargo, North Dakota's largest school district, one year in Epping, one of North Dakota's smallest districts, followed by 37 years in business, in 2010 I stepped back into education when Superintendent Greg McNary hired me to drive school bus. I quickly moved into double and triple duties at District Eight, driving school bus, becoming Director of Busing, and working with Special Needs children. My job as director of the program was to redesign the bus routing system to make it safer, and more efficient for our students and drivers. I also did substitute teaching at Eight Mile School District 6, Trenton, ND.

In the summer of the 2013/2014 school year, a job opened at Trenton for a Social Studies Teacher. I was asked to move into the position because of my work at Trenton, my professionalism, and my work ethics. I have been at Trenton ever since and will be starting my 9th year of work there in the 2021/2022 school year. I am currently the High School Interventionist and online coordinator for the Trenton Digital Academy. Part of my job is to act as the liaison between the teachers, students, and parents. In addition to that, I do all grading and working with students on their online classes. We started working on our remote learning programs within days of our shut down in March of 2020 and had it up and running within a noticeably brief period. Over the summer, our teachers and administrators worked to make the program even better. But our goal was to have our students back in school instead of remote learning. Our teacher leadership

committee along with administration worked extremely hard to develop a safe way to bring our students back into the classroom by the start of school year 2021/2022. This group developed a safe, proactive way to get our kids back in the classroom by implementing a mandatory "mask wearing" program in school by students, teachers, staff, paras, administration, and all visitors. Masks were also required on all school buses with mandatory seating assignments. These seating assignments were extended to all classrooms also so that contact tracing could be accomplished when necessary.

Because of my age (71), at the end of the 2020/2021 school year and my knowledge of COVID-19 I was genuinely concerned and considered retiring. But with the leadership of our teacher leadership committee, our Superintendent, Matt Schriver, our two principals, Steve Morban and Kay Cavanaugh, I decided to stay and help do the online program and continue my intervention work. It is only because of their hard work and the following of state and CDC guidelines in regards to COVID-19 that our school has had the remarkable success we have had.

At the beginning of the school year, we had to shut down because the virus was brought in from the outside by a number of students. We went to remote learning from that time until just after Labor Day, and then an alternating in school/remote learning for another period of time. Since that time because of our mandated "mask wearing," sanitizing, and deep cleaning we have been doing in class instruction and will continue until the end of the school year. Our school has been a success, a success that scientifically we can say happened because we followed the CDC and state DPI guidelines. I make this statement because of my Health major, Physical Education major, my History major, my

Athletic Training minor, and a strong background in biology from the University of Minnesota, Mankato, and Minot State.

I started back in December of 2019 when the virus first was heard of and broke out in Wuhan, China talking to my students about the virus and the highly likely possibility it would come here. I was not on the ground in China, information was in short supply but if you looked hard enough you could find it. The young Chinese doctor, who first broke the news, got in trouble with the Chinese government, and later died from the virus was a reliable source of information for me. He gave his life trying to warn us. But he also gave us clues, and this is why way before almost anyone in this country started wearing a mask, I did. I told my students I would never lie to them or mislead them. I wanted them to know and understand that knowledge is power and gives you the power to make good decisions. This helps quell fear and mistrust.

Gentlemen the truth matters! Science has put us on the moon, protected the peace, given us lifesaving medicines, and has moved us to the point where we have a chance to control this virus once and for all. This virus has shown how truly united the world is both positive and negative. I showed my students how a person who is knowingly or unknowingly infected can get on a plane in Wuhan, fly to the west coast, fly to Chicago, fly to New York, fly to London, fly to Paris, fly to Dubai, fly to Mumbai, and then back to China in just two or three days. This person can infect people all the way around the world, who then infect all the people they come in contact with. I started wearing a mask because of my knowledge of how diseases spread like the flu and information that was there if you were willing to listen and hear it. I have continued ever since and will continue for the foreseeable future. Neither my wife nor I have been sick all year

long, and both of us have worn a mask. We gave up Christmas and Thanksgiving with our son and daughter-in-law to protect ourselves and them. My son is a Doctor of Nurse Anesthetist. He knows the importance of wearing masks. Would any of you let a surgeon and the nurse team come in and do your surgery without wearing PPE which include a mask? You know the answer is no. Would my State Senator who is a dentist not wear a mask during his work? You know the answer is no.

Again, our school put a plan in place that worked. It allowed for in person classroom instruction and the safety of our students, staff, and parents. "Masks" are and will remain a critical part of our success story. Social distancing, contact tracing, and sanitizing are also a part of the success we have had. Do not take our ability to make and implement programs that put the SAFETY of students, staff, administration, and parents in jeopardy!

As Republicans you are supposedly on the side of pro local control. Pro health and safety of first responders which includes, police, EMTs, doctors, nurses, and fire fighters. Are you now going to give up that mantle? Are you now going to "take a way" control of businesses, local mayors, local school boards, local doctors, the State Health Department, DPI, and our elected Governor? What if, yes, what if another even more devastating virus comes in or this mutates and becomes more deadly as if 550,500 is not enough!

You must vote down and defeat this misguided pseudo-science attempt in House Bill 1323 to fundamentally kill science, local and private control, good Public Health Practices that are scientifically rooted in sound science that saves lives. Laws based in science already regulate lives to prevent unnecessary death in the name of safety and public health. Seat belts are required; tough DUI

laws are in place; no smoking in buildings of all kinds even restaurants and bars is in place; laws requiring a special license to drive a motorcycle; tough laws when I was a kid for teenage driver license requirements; speed limit laws; laws limiting constitutional free speech. These are just a few of the hundreds of laws that you or the Federal Government has passed, all based in science and sound logic in the name of Public Health and Safety.

Misinformation, unscientific claims, self-centeredness, all shouted in the name of "You are violating my rights," does not make it true. The United State Supreme Court ruled in *Jacobson v, Massachusetts*, on February 20th, 1905 that the good and welfare of the Commonwealth outweighs the need of Jacobson. We have always and sometimes reluctantly passed laws to protect lives and Public Health. A mandate by the Governor, businesses, local mayors, local school boards is a temporary measure to save lives, not permanent law. It is a public health measure that is put into place "because some individual(s) refuse to put the wellbeing of the majority of people when it comes to saving lives, above their own selfish, self-centered wants or desires.

There will be another pandemic, and we are not even out of this one yet! You cannot and must not put the Public Safety of the majority of North Dakotans at risk because of a few who do not believe or follow science. The next one may even be more contagious and deadly. Do not hamstring your leaders from the Governor to local school boards from taking the action to save lives. If you do, the blood of the unnecessary lives lost are on your hands. The economic toll that will be far greater is also on your hands. You must not prevent the Governor, Public Health Officials, Local School Boards from making Public Health decisions.

This is not a Democrat or a Republican issue. This is a Public Health and safety issue. Let the scientist, doctors, and those on the front lines make the decisions that they know will save lives. NO ONE WANTS OR DESERVES AN EMPTY CHAIR AT THE TABLE NEXT CHRISTMAS, THANKSGIVING, OR THE NEXT. Defeat this misguided Anti-science, Anti-life, Anti-common-sense bill and do not make our great state look like "pariah!"

Thank you for your patience and time! If you have any questions, I will answer them at this time.