

Chairman Weisz, Vice Chairman Ruby, and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am a member of North Dakotans for Open Access Healthcare and strongly support HB 1416. I believe this bill has the interest of all North Dakota citizens at heart and shifts the focus of healthcare in our state to the patient rather than the provider.

Not for profit, community-based hospitals are mission driven organizations focused on meeting a community need. When these same organizations move into the health insurance industry and restrict access to other providers, it creates a situation where we are no longer focusing on meeting the needs of the community. These organizations seem to be more focused on “dominating” or “controlling” the market. The longer North Dakota allows vertically integrated health systems to control the insurance market, the closer we will creep towards a monopolistic healthcare environment.

At the end of the day, this is about patients having the ability to choose what is best for them. Each facility or provider excels in different specialties and different aspects of healthcare. Unfortunately, our health insurance market is largely decided by employers, not the patient themselves. For this reason, it’s important that providers compete on cost, quality, experience and access. Healthcare providers should not simply be considered out of network when their logo isn’t blue. Healthcare is one of the only industries in our state and country where transparency is far from the norm. As a healthcare professional, I can tell you that vertically integrated health systems are not the most cost-effective solution in healthcare and that there are many lower cost options available outside of hospital based walls. Unfortunately, health insurance makes those cost savings invisible to the patient and incentives are lost.

This bill is a step in the right direction in leveling the playing field in North Dakota healthcare. If even one patient is able to choose a provider they trust based on a prior recommendation or a relationship, then this bill did its job.

I strongly encourage a DO PASS recommendation from your committee.

Sincerely,

Jed LaPlante, MHA
Administrator
Center for Special Surgery
Fargo, ND