



February 6, 2023

Testimony on House Bill 1416

A BILL to an Act to create and enact section 26.1 36 12.7 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to freedom of choice for health care services.

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I wish to share with the representatives of the State of North Dakota my experience as a pharmacist and administrator in rural health care and how these experiences relate to freedom of choice for health care services. I started as a pharmacist in Rugby, North Dakota in 2000. I have worked as a hospital and retail pharmacist, pharmacy owner, director of pharmacy, and most recently as a hospital administrator. Much of my professional life has been dedicated to providing health care to rural North Dakotans and I have a passion to assure that these patients continue to have viable access to good health care.

One of the major concerns expressed by the patients I have worked with over the years is the concern of having the freedom to choose the providers they wish to see for their health care needs. Most recently, this concern was raised when the Heart of America Medical Center joined a new accountable care organization. I have and will continue to work hard to assure our community has choice when it comes to the providers they see. This is a valid concern as these patients often have limited resources and they must be able to choose a provider that meets their needs given these limited resources.

I have the unique perspective regarding limited networks of care as a pharmacist. The pharmacy industry over the years has seen a rise in limited provider choices due to insurers narrowing the pharmacy selection available to patients. Many patients are forced to choose a mail order pharmacy over their local pharmacy provider. This limited network can serve to increase confusion and frustration for the patients. It also does not appear that these limited networks are saving money for the patients or society as a whole. From 2012 to 2022 the annual prescription drug expenditures for Medicare have increased from \$67.5 Billion to \$143.2 Billion. (CMS, 2023) The narrowed networks created by the large



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pharmacies, pharmacy benefit managers, and insurers are not allowing for a competitive environment that would help reducing costs. Instead, these large companies are cornering the market and forcing our communities to pay more for needed medications.

So in summary, I support the passage of this legislation as I feel that it is important to assure that our citizens have access to good care and that insurance companies not inhibit that access. Also, I believe there is good reason to believe that limiting access does not save money for the patients or the community as a whole. Good health care is important to North Dakotans and I feel this bill will help to assure good health care continues.

Respectfully,

Erik Christenson

Reference:

CMS (2023). National Health Expenditure Data. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Retrieved on February, 5 2023. <https://www.cms.gov/research-statistics-data-and-systems/statistics-trends-and-reports/nationalhealthexpenddata/nhe-fact-sheet>