



**House Human Services Committee
HB 1502
January 23, 2023**

Chair Weisz and committee members, thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on this important issue to health care in North Dakota. My name is Andy Askew, and I serve as Essentia Health's Vice President of Public Policy. Prior to joining Essentia in February 2020, I served as its contract lobbyist here in Bismarck while working as an attorney.

Essentia Health is an integrated health system serving patients in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Headquartered in Duluth, Minnesota, we roughly 15,000 employees who serve patients and communities through our 14 hospitals, 77 clinics, 6 long-term care facilities, 3 assisted living facilities, 3 independent living facilities, 6 ambulance services, 24 retail pharmacies, and 1 research institute. Essentia Health is an accredited accountable care organization by the National Committee for Quality Assurance and is focused on the triple aim of better health, improving patient experience, and lowering costs.

Essentia Health has made the decision to require the COVID-19 vaccine as a condition of employment at all our facilities. Review of the extensive scientific research demonstrates that the COVID-19 vaccination is a safe and highly effective way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 – for our patients and health care professionals. To this end, it is vital that all who can receive the vaccine do so, especially health care workers whose duty it is to protect the vulnerable, elderly and critically ill. Just as we have done with our flu vaccine policy, which was adopted in 2017, there is a process for employees to request a medical exemption based upon guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or a religious exemption.

Patients entrust their care to us in some of the most vulnerable times in their lives. Our mission and values obligate us to do all we can to protect our patients from COVID-19, while providing high-quality care that they need. For these reasons, we respectfully request a Do Not Pass recommendation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Askew".

Andrew Askew
Vice President of Public Policy
Essentia Health