

Thank you to the Chair Lefor and the committee for this opportunity to speak. My name is Dr. Natalie Dvorak, and I am a general pediatrician in the Fargo/Moorhead area. I was born and raised in Grand Forks, and I graduated University of North Dakota Medical School. I practice in Moorhead and Fargo. I am here today in support of paid family medical leave for the health and wellness of all my North Dakota patients and their families.

As a pediatrician, I am a physician for newborns through young adults. A large part of my day to day is seeing newborns and infants. I see firsthand the struggles faced by my patients and their families due to lack of paid family medical leave. Anyone who is a parent knows that taking care of a child is one of the most important and challenging experiences in one's life. What happens to a child in their first years has lifelong effects. I am here today to tell you the health benefits of paid family medical leave.

Paid maternity leave has several health benefits for mom's and infants. It is associated with lower infant mortality. In North Dakota, we care about the lives of babies. It increases breastfeeding duration and improves maternal and infant bonding. Breastmilk is the best nutrition for an infant, and it helps protect them from infections. Breastfeeding has benefits for mothers too including lowering the risk of ovarian and breast cancer, decreases bleeding after delivery, and helps with weight loss. Mothers that receive paid maternity leave are more likely to bring their children to doctor visits for immunizations and preventative medical care. We all know that immunizations prevent serious infections and routine medical visits are important to ensure your child is growing and developing normally. Lastly, it is associated with reduced maternal stress and reduced risk of postpartum depression and anxiety.

Many people may think that employers already provide paid family leave; however, this is just not true in my experience. It is not uncommon for me to hear moms to returning to work within in 2-6 weeks. Most of the dads I see take only 1-2 weeks off. Infants less than three months are at elevated risk of contracting serious infectious illnesses. I have taken care of so many infants that are critically ill from RSV that was contracted through daycare.

I also want to let you all know that I recently had a baby, and I am on my last days of maternity leave. My maternity leave is unpaid time off. I am fortunate to have a job that allows me financial security; however, growing my family has significant financial implications as I am the major bread winner for my family.

I urge you all today to support house bill 1460 for the health and wellness of our children, our most precious ND residents, and their families.

Sincerely,

Dr. Natalie Dvorak