

Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee,
My name is Laura Frisch and I serve on the senior leadership team of the Community Violence Intervention Center (CVIC) in Grand Forks, ND, a dual domestic violence and sexual assault agency. I am testifying in support of HB 1492, which would add a definition of mental injury in North Dakota's child abuse statute and would include in that definition when children are exposed to domestic violence.

As a practicing social worker, I have received training on mandated reporting of child abuse, including situations in which a child witnesses or otherwise experiences domestic violence. HB 1492 would affirm that children exposed to domestic violence does cause mental injury and would provide a criminal penalty as well.

Children exposed to domestic violence experience significant effects, both short term and long term. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, a collaboration funded by the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and jointly coordinated by UCLA and Duke University, short term effects of children exposed to domestic violence includes:

- Generalized anxiety
- Sleeplessness
- Nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating
- High activity levels
- Increased aggression
- Increased anxiety about being separated from a parent
- Intense worry about their safety or the safety of a parent

Long-term effects, especially when repeatedly exposed to violence include:

- Physical health problems
- Behavior problems in adolescence (e.g., delinquency, alcohol or substance abuse)
- Emotional difficulties in adulthood (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD)

Exposure to domestic violence has also been linked to poor school performance, impaired ability to concentrate, difficulty completing homework, and lower scores on verbal, motor, and social skills.

Equally important in mitigating the effects of exposure to domestic violence is the role of the non-abusive, protective parent. HB 1492 should not be used to charge the protective parent for "allowing" a child to be exposed to domestic violence, but instead should be used to hold the offender of domestic violence accountable. With this concern noted, I ask the committee for a Do Pass recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Frisch