

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2227
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The North Dakota Health Council is a state body that informs and advises the Department of Health and Human Services (NDDHHS), and the State Health Officer, about the health concerns and priorities of the citizens of North Dakota. The members are comprised of representatives of stakeholder groups and citizen groups who understand the needs of the people of North Dakota and can provide critical input to the NDDHHS and the state health officer.

In 1999 North Dakota was the healthiest state in the nation, reported by America's Health Rankings. We have since slipped to 18th. As a proud North Dakota native, currently working every day to serve the health of the people of North Dakota, I want to see us reclaim our ranking. In order to do this, several efforts are paramount:

1. We need to improve the engagement of stakeholders and citizen groups with this challenge. During our recent COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most important lessons learned was that input from stakeholders, community leaders and frontline public health workers was lacking and that timely and transparent communication was insufficient. The redesigning of the health council as proposed in this bill and increasing the size and breadth of the membership of the North Dakota Health Council will address this problem.
2. We need to establish a strategic plan for improved population health and entrust the NDDHHS with the responsibility of monitoring progress toward this strategic plan. The new roles of the North Dakota Health Council as designed in this bill will be expanded and will be more attentive to the strategic plan and programs of the Health Division of the Department of Health and Human Services.
3. We need to establish baseline population health benchmarks, and then evaluate policies and funding toward the purpose of meeting the population health goals established upon those benchmarks. We cannot become the healthiest state in the nation by improving the clinical services that insured persons receive. We can only become the healthiest state in the nation by focusing on improving the health of everyone in the state. This is the mission of the health council.

It is my opinion that SB 2227 will revitalize the health council, will bring to the table a wider representation of stakeholders and citizen representatives, and give the health council roles that are essential for seeing North Dakota once again be the healthiest state in the nation.