



Senate Human Services Committee

SB 2272

February 8, 2023

Chair Lee and Committee Members, I am Courtney Koebele, the Executive Director of the North Dakota Medical Association. The North Dakota Medical Association is the professional membership organization for North Dakota physicians, residents, and medical students. NDMA has concerns and opposes SB 2272.

All hospitals in our state, including PPS hospitals, struggle to find beds for those patients that need a higher level of psychiatric care than what they can provide. Finding inpatient psychiatric placement can be a time-consuming process. There are times when a patient has to be held for several hours or even overnight in the ER when their needs cannot be met at a private hospital and are awaiting acceptance at the state hospital. Restricting the state hospital to caring only for forensic patients would only make this problem worse.

It is not a safe or otherwise appropriate setting for patients that have serious mental health conditions to be cared for in a lower level of care, any more than it would be appropriate for a patient in need of surgical intervention to be kept in a facility without an available surgeon. Care of mental health patients requires trained staff and appropriate facilities intended for that purpose. This is not borne of the desire for private hospitals to be rid of a patient, but of the need for the patient to be cared for in the setting appropriate for their condition.

An inpatient psychiatric patient can require 1:1 staffing 24/7, depending upon the patient's condition. That equates to three nurses per patient. Additionally, security staff may be necessary to ensure safety for both our patients and our staff. Hospitals already struggle to fill nursing positions, particularly psychiatric nurses.

The state hospital is, and needs to continue to be, that safety net for those patients that have high acuity, serious mental health conditions that cannot be safely cared for in the private hospital system.

We urge a DO NOT PASS on SB 2272. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.