



2023 Senate Bill no. 2384
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Judy Lee, Chairman
February 7, 2023

Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services, I am Chris Meeker, a board-certified emergency physician and I serve as chief medical officer at Sanford Health Bismarck.

I respectfully ask for a **Do Not Pass** recommendation on SB 2384, a bill that would prohibit the use of vaccines developed using messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) technology. Messenger RNA is used to instruct the body to produce specific proteins called spike proteins. These proteins look similar to those of the virus, and this antigen triggers the body's immune system to create specific antibodies that can fight off the real virus. MRNA medicines fight diseases in a different way than traditional medicine by prompting your immune system to create the tools to treat or prevent disease.

The idea of prohibiting mRNA vaccines is troubling in many ways.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to note that the only FDA-approved vaccines against Sars-CoV-2 use mRNA technology. It cannot be overstated the profound impact mRNA technology has had on curbing hospitalizations and death while mitigating socioeconomic repercussions of the pandemic. The Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines have collectively saved three million lives and prevented 18 million hospitalizations in the United States.

Further, the vaccines are safe. While COVID-19 vaccines were developed rapidly, all steps have been taken to ensure their safety and effectiveness (see attached "How Did the COVID-19 Vaccine Get Developed So Quickly?").

In the two years since these COVID-19 vaccines became available, the U.S. has administered more than 655 million doses with few adverse events. The risk of adverse events is extremely low and the benefits of the vaccines far outweigh risk of COVID-19 infection complications including long COVID, myocarditis and pulmonary embolism.

From a practical standpoint, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) mandates all healthcare providers require all staff members to be vaccinated. Failure to comply places the provider at risk of losing Medicare and Medicaid payments, a tremendous financial penalty.

Finally, by targeting mRNA vaccines, SB 2384 not only prohibits COVID-19 prevention, it threatens future administration of promising protection against new infectious diseases and variants of existing ones including influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), hepatitis C and norovirus (a.k.a. stomach flu). What's more, clinical trials are testing mRNA treatment vaccines in people with various types of cancer, including pancreatic cancer, colorectal cancer, and melanoma.

For these reasons, we ask that you give the bill a **Do Not Pass** recommendation. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

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