

Prepared Testimony of Shauna Erickson-Abou Zahr, M.S., LMFT

Testimony in Favor of House Bill 1284

Chairman Ruby and Members of the Committee:

I share my testimony in favor of HB 1284 as a person who has spent her life in our state, built my career serving the mental health of others in our state, and whom now needs you to advocate for coverage of one of my most essential medical treatments I have ever had: fertility preservation. I wanted to be a mom for decades and raise my children in Fargo where I had grown up. I was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 32. Because of the nature of my treatment (chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery), fertility preservation was the only remaining route to secure a possibility of being a mother one day. My point being, that North Dakotas arrive at requiring IVF to preserve fertility to build families in our states for diverse, personal, and devastating circumstances, and certainly don't deserve to live in debt to build our community with their beautiful families.

I had cancer at age 32. I learned over the last 5 years that I am not alone in my early cancer diagnosis in our state. I had lost wages due to time away from work, short term disability only covering some of my pay, but most concerning was that I had to come up with \$20,000 to be able to secure a potential to still be a mother one day for one round of IVF. Because of the time sensitivity of my chemotherapy starting, I ended up needing more IVF after chemotherapy to secure more embryos for future use. These IVF treatments totaled \$130,000 to date. Now to a non-profit mental health therapist, these dollar amounts sound catastrophic, and they have been. I haven't been able to pay off my student loans, and carried credit card balances for many months due to this. However, in also being a cancer survivor, I am acutely aware that \$130,000 is a small drop in a big sea of spending in medicine. ONE chemotherapy ranging from \$30,000-50,000, and needing a series of these treatments, then surgery, then radiation. So when we speculate that IVF is going to be too catastrophic on the budget, I think that needs to be compared to what other covered services run.

I've previously heard infertility reasons as an "elective" procedure. We are North Dakotans, with deep value systems that include family as a primary. There is nothing "elective" about getting the opportunity to debut into parenthood, and anyone that is thinking that, needs to look at their own children and consider if there were just "electives" somewhere along the line. By not covering IVF procedures, we are leaving North Dakotans at risk of economic despair because they will do what they need to in order to build their families. This cost systemically can be afforded if it means we get to continue building beautiful North Dakotan families.

Please consider moving towards fertility preservation coverage to support more North Dakota couples to become families, and vote in favor of HB 1284.

Sincerely,



Shauna M. Erickson-Abou Zahr

1/24/25