

Olivia Data
Testimony in Opposition to HB 1373
February 5 2025

Chairman Ruby and members of the committee,

My name is Olivia Data, and I am a resident of North Dakota. I am writing to you to urge you to vote “Do Not Pass” on HB 1373.

I understand that many biologists agree that life begins at fertilization. I also understand that there are many Christians in our state who believe life begins at conception. But – even aside from the fact that *not* all scientists¹ and *not* all religions agree², and aside from the fact that attempting to legislate religious morality is a violation of our legislature’s duty to respect all North Dakotans – the idea that life begins at conception must not be codified in this way.

If our state grants legal personhood to a fetus, then we treat abortion as homicide rather than healthcare. Under such a definition, we would limit the bodily autonomy of pregnant people to a dangerous extreme.

Abortion to save a mother’s life would be illegal in many circumstances, even acknowledging Section 2b. Pregnancy is never a health-neutral event, and there are many situations in which a pregnancy could potentially be life-threatening³. When would a doctor be allowed to intervene? When a pregnant person shows the first signs of a high-risk pregnancy? When a woman is bleeding out on an operating table? When she’s already dead? What counts as taking *reasonable* steps to save an unborn child?

If we grant legal personhood to a fetus, then abortion even in cases of rape or incest could be illegal. Perhaps it is your personal opinion that a survivor of the most hideous form of assault should suffer intrusions on their bodily autonomy for at least another 9 months, no matter the cost to their body, career, or mental health. However, I would hope that you at least pause before passing such an opinion into law.

None of us have the right to demand that a fellow human being attach us to their body and use their own life to sustain us for 9 months. Similarly, no one should be forced to surrender their life and liberty for a dangerous or unwanted pregnancy. No woman should be treated as less-than-human in service to a law which ignores the complex realities of health and morality. HB 1373 diminishes the safety and freedom of any person with the capacity to become pregnant,

¹Paulson, Richard J. 2022. “It Is Worth Repeating: ‘Life Begins at Conception’ Is a Religious, Not Scientific, Concept.” *F&S Reports* 3 (3): 177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xfre.2022.08.005>.

²National Council of Jewish Women. 2022. “Advocacy Resource Judaism and Abortion.” *National Council of Jewish Women*. <https://www.ncjw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Judaism-and-Abortion-FINAL.pdf>.

³MPH, Sara Neill, MD, and Scott Shainker MS DO. 2023. “Is Pregnancy Safe for Everyone?” *Harvard Health*. January 25, 2023. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/is-pregnancy-safe-for-everyone-202301252881>.

and it signals to the women of North Dakota that our bodies and lives can be taken from us on a whim.

Chairman Ruby and members of the committee, I am 21 years old. I have been writing testimony to the North Dakota legislature begging you not to take away my ability to make healthcare decisions about my own body since I was 17 and in high school. I have grown up with the knowledge hanging over my head that many of my legislators value my hypothetical future baby more than they value me. I have grown up terrified that I will not have the right to ownership over my own uterus, that I will not have the right to make my own choices or protect my own life.

I understand that my testimony may seem severe, but I am afraid, and I am sick of being afraid. Please protect girls and women like me who deserve basic safety and autonomy. Please make the right decision. Oppose HB 1373.

Thank you for your time in reviewing my testimony.

Sincerely,
Olivia Data