

**House Human Services Committee
Representative Matt Ruby, Chair
February 5, 2025
HB 1373**

Chairman Ruby and committee members: My name is Steffen Christensen and I am a reproductive endocrinologist with Sanford Reproductive Medicine in Fargo.

I am here to strongly oppose HR1373. I believe the definition changes will have unintended consequences for fertility medicine that will be detrimental to patients wishing to start families in North Dakota, and to the recruitment and retention of physicians within our state.

This bill introduces definitions which at best misunderstand the natural fertility process, and at worse create liability for results beyond any individual's reasonable control. This creates a climate of uncertainty for physicians, nurses, laboratory personnel, healthcare providers, and patients themselves. Individuals whose sole aim is assist in the creation of new life and new families, would be subjected to potentially severe penalties for results they cannot control and do not intend.

This uncertainty is a critical issue in recruiting and retaining physicians who want to practice fertility medicine, particularly when we already face challenges recruiting healthcare professionals to our state. In 2023, North Dakota had four practicing infertility physicians, but with my retirement later this year, we will be left with just one. Recruiting skilled physicians to North Dakota is already an uphill battle, and this bill will make it even more difficult—if not impossible. The fear of legal liability for doing the admirable work of helping North Dakota citizens become parents could deter potential medical professionals from considering North Dakota as a place to practice.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the impact on the next generation of healthcare professionals. There are over 300 medical students at our university who are closely watching how the legislature handles bills like this, which could impact their future ability to practice medicine in North Dakota. If they perceive the state as a place where medical professionals are at risk of prosecution for providing standard care, many may be discouraged from returning to practice here. We already face shortages in family medicine and certain specialties, and we cannot afford to make it even more difficult to retain or attract physicians.

I urge you to reconsider this bill, as it poses a serious threat to the recruitment and retention of qualified healthcare professionals in North Dakota. The potential for legal uncertainty will only worsen our ability to attract the skilled professionals we desperately need in order to maintain and improve the quality of healthcare across our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I trust you will take these concerns into account as you make decisions that will shape the future of healthcare in North Dakota.

Steffen Christensen, M.D.
Sanford Reproductive Medicine
701-234-2700