

Human Services Committee

HB 1373

February 5, 2025

Chair Ruby and members of the Committee,

My name is Amber Hoekstra and I am an embryologist in the only reproductive medicine clinic in North Dakota. I am speaking as a North Dakota citizen with a knowledgeable, educated background regarding the subject of this bill. Bill HB 1373 sets to define personhood as when a sperm cell fertilizes an egg cell because “life begins at conception”. As an embryologist, I know this is not entirely accurate. This ball of cells that begins to form after fertilization has a long way to go before becoming a viable human being. The first five to seven days after an egg and sperm join, it travels through the female reproductive tract. It is these same five to seven days that these cells are monitored in the IVF lab. At this point, the cells are multiplying, but they would not be able to sustain on their own. After this time, if the cells have developed normally, they may implant in the uterus.

Not all fertilizations will create viable embryos that will become human beings. In spontaneous conceptions, between 13 and 23% will end in a biochemical pregnancy. That means that in these pregnancies, the dividing cells did not develop properly. The cells that first form after conception can become any cell needed to create any part of a human being. During development, they differentiate, and, in some instances, they don't become what is essential to continue to form a viable embryo. This is scientific fact and cannot be dictated by specific personal viewpoints. You can't say that life begins at conception when not all conceptions will become a life. As an embryologist, it is worrying to think that I could be charged with assault or murder because these cells were completing a process that has happened throughout humankind's existence.

I urge the committee to vote No on HB 1373. Many North Dakotans rely on fertility treatments to create families. Passing this bill would make it more difficult to provide these services due to the risk of a criminal offense, thereby limiting family building for these citizens. Unfortunately, 1 in 6 people are facing this reality today. One group's ideology shouldn't limit choices for others. North Dakota needs to provide care based on scientific evidence and not personal beliefs.

Thank you for your consideration,

Amber Hoekstra MLS(ASCP)^{CM}