

**Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1391**  
**House Human Services Committee**  
**February 4, 2025**

Chairman Ruby and Members of the House Human Services Committee, my name is Reier Thompson, and I am the President and CEO at Missouri Slope here in Bismarck. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 1391. I strongly urge the committee to give this bill a **Do Not Pass** recommendation.

**The Consequences of HB 1391 on Healthcare Facilities**

As a healthcare provider, I recognize the importance of fair practices in all staffing related matters, especially with the workforce shortage we are experiencing in this industry. However, HB 1391 significantly reduces our ability to make decisions that will ultimately protect the lives of over 300 residents and tenants that live with us at Missouri Slope. Taking away our ability to mandate influenza vaccinations for our employees will create an environment that is less safe for the severely compromised individuals we care for every day.

When I began my career at Missouri Slope in 2013, we did not have an employee mandate for the influenza vaccination. We offered it voluntarily and about a third of our employees would get vaccinated. After many years of high rates of infection among our residents, we decided to implement the vaccination mandate in 2015. Our rates of infection decreased dramatically the following year and all years since have continued to yield very low rates of infection.

**Impact on Residents**

All people receiving care in a nursing facility must have a physician's order stating this level of care is necessary. The majority of nursing facility residents have multiple comorbidities which leaves them vulnerable to diseases such as influenza. They do not have healthy immune systems fighting the virus causing influenza and their symptoms can be severe, or even deadly. Our duty is to protect the health of our residents through whatever means necessary to assure maximum safety and comfort.

**Impact on Workforce**

When we began the influenza vaccination mandate, we had few if any employees who did not comply with the policy and terminate their employment. We look at this as a commitment not only to our residents, but also the employees who expect to work in a safe environment. Doing all we legally can to prevent the spread of influenza through a vaccination mandate has improved the health of our workforce and lowered lost days due to illness.

Occasionally, we have employees seek medical or religious exemptions to the mandate. These are examined on a case by case basis for approval or denial. There are times when employees

have decided not to begin employment due to the mandate and their choice not to get vaccinated. Given the workforce crisis in healthcare, these situations are not desirable. However, the overall effect is minimal as we continue to staff our buildings at levels which meet or exceed state and national standards.

### **Too Many Regulations**

Skilled nursing facilities are under a great deal of stress from the hundreds of regulations imposed upon us by the government. The number, complexity, and severity of these regulations has grown immensely during my 15 years of healthcare experience. The last thing we need is another regulation stipulating what we can or cannot do while operating our facilities.

### **Conclusion**

Healthcare facilities provide critical care to North Dakota's elderly and most vulnerable residents. HB 1391 will take away our ability to make decisions we feel are necessary to provide safe, high quality care.

I urge the committee to reject HB 1391 and instead pursue policies that support, rather than weaken, North Dakota's health care system.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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