

## **HOUSE BILL 1457**

### **Testimony in Opposition**

**2-4-25**

Hello, Chair Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee. My name is Brenda Stallman. I am the Executive Officer at Traill District Health Unit, located in Hillsboro, and I am here to speak in opposition of imposing added unnecessary and dangerous roadblocks on a method of disease prevention that has allowed us to be present in gatherings such as this and be confident that we are not going to be exposed to a vaccine preventable disease that is easily transmitted, debilitating, and life-threatening.

Molly Howell, MPH, our state's Immunization Director & Assistant Section Director, Disease Control and Forensic Pathology is here and is the best spokesperson to most precisely address current vaccine trials and safety documentation. We can also tell you that ND has allowed vaccine exemptions in place already that are more lenient than most states. I can tell you that every vaccine we give has a specific vaccine information statement (VIS) that clearly outlines the purpose of the vaccine, the intended administration schedule, the health history situations that would be reason to avoid vaccination, the risks of a vaccine reaction and where to go in the case of a serious reaction, and how to report any injury resulting from a vaccine, and how to file a claim to receive compensation related to an injury from a vaccine.

In 34 years in my position as a public health professional, I have had zero serious reactions to a vaccine. The only memorable response to a vaccine was a seizure that was determined to be a result of fear of needles. The individual had an intense fear of all needles and had a history of this type of response.

As Molly will no doubt explain, our vaccines have mostly been through vigorous vaccine trials and documented safety trials noted. There are 3 phases of a clinical trial, and with Covid vaccine the trials were conducted concurrently rather than separately as most vaccines are. For this, I am thankful, because let me tell you what it was like to be working in public health at the time of the pandemic. It is a story that has been told many times, and people are tired of hearing about Covid. But yet, it needs to be told until the significance of the vaccine and the demand for it is understood.

*We had people flying in from around the United States and traveling to our little town of Hillsboro anticipating getting the Covid vaccine. We were inundated with residents of neighboring states that were unable to get it locally. We had to continuously determine if those demanding the vaccine were “essential workers and if so, they would be put at the top of the list to receive the limited doses we had at the time. Moving forward, it would only cause harm and danger to our population if we block access to available tools that will keep our schools and health facilities staffed, and our businesses open.*

*Let me ask you, have you ever been told a procedure or surgery is needed; or that a medication is necessary to treat a given condition? Or a drug is being prescribed to prevent heart disease, or stroke? And have any of those*

*procedures or drugs been recommended with a promise of no side effects? Of course not. But the risk of not following the prescribed treatment far outweighs the slim possibility of an adverse event from taking the treatment.*

Has anyone you love been given a diagnosis of cancer? I have gone through this more than once. The “C” word itself carries such an immediate threat to the safety and security of our life as we know it, the health and wellbeing of our loved ones, and the thought of losing them floods our minds. Imagine, also, if promising new treatments are showing results that no traditional therapies have. Clinical trials are being conducted and studies have already shown tremendous success. Would any of us refuse this opportunity if we were offered the one lifeline that could restore the health of our child or spouse and keep them in our lives? I accompanied by sister-in-law to Duke University to seek admission to a clinical trial for brain cancer when all other treatments failed. My dad went to Mayo to seek assistance with finding any help with his terminal cancer that others couldn’t provide. Both my sister-in-law and my dad lost their lives to these horrible diseases.

You may think a vaccine has nothing to do with clinical trials related to cancer. My point of this is “We have proven preventions for over 20 diseases that are contagious, cause pain and suffering and are life-threatening. I simply do not understand any deliberate action that will take us back in time and have an increased chance of contracting these diseases, or even worse our children and grandchildren suffering from something preventable. Especially when the safety and efficacy of these measures have been proven and avenues for reporting the remote chance of a reaction or injury are in place.

Finally, I would like to speak to the idea that removing vaccine requirements is going to somehow make our world more to our liking. I am going to share with you some important news that even most of my family does know. This is a Christmas gift I received from my son and his wife of now 3 months. It is a Christmas ornament that reads, "Congratulations Grandma and Grandpa, see you in 2025!" My first grandchild!

For the first 2 months of life, this child will not be eligible for any vaccines. In absence of required vaccines this child will go to clinic appointments, day care, the grocery store, basketball games, and other community events where there is no longer the safety net vaccines provide against measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis, polio, meningitis, rotavirus, and other diseases that are all preventable yet life threatening if not stopped with routine vaccines.

I also have an 89 year old mother residing in an assisted living facility here in Bismarck. Our elders experience waning immunity to some diseases they have have been vaccinated against. Imagine the devastation of our parents becoming ill needlessly through interaction with a staff member of a visitor unknowingly not vaccinated? Who will take care of our loved ones if staff are home with their unvaccinated child due to an outbreak in their school? And who will teach these children when teachers and their children are sick?

Why would we knowingly cause an avoidable threat to the health and life of these vulnerable children and adults? I know everyone in this room values the life of your children, grandchildren, and hopefully your parents. I urge you to give serious thought about the kind of world you want them to navigate; one of optimal health being given all the protections we have to offer, or one of extreme danger where diseases once held at

bay once are again threatening and taking lives and denying them the same opportunities we had and the futures they deserve?

Thank you for listening to my testimony today.