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HB 1457
Testimony of Amy De Kok
House Human Services Committee
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Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Amy De Kok, and I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 168 public school districts and their boards. I write to express opposition to HB 1457, which proposes broad exemptions from required vaccinations, including those necessary for school attendance. This legislation poses a significant threat to public health, particularly the health and safety of children in our schools.

The Critical Role of School Immunizations

School immunization requirements exist to protect children, families, and communities from preventable diseases. Vaccines have been rigorously studied and proven to reduce the spread of infectious diseases, safeguard vulnerable populations, and prevent outbreaks that could jeopardize public health. HB 1457 introduces unscientific and unrealistic barriers to the approval and administration of vaccines, threatening decades of progress in disease prevention.

Increased Risk of Disease Outbreaks

By allowing broad exemptions based on new, arbitrary standards, this bill will lead to lower vaccination rates among school-aged children. Reduced immunization coverage weakens herd immunity, putting those who cannot be vaccinated—such as infants, immunocompromised students, and those with legitimate medical exemptions—at greater risk. This bill increases the likelihood of outbreaks of measles, pertussis, and other highly contagious diseases, which can have severe, lifelong consequences.

Unrealistic Vaccine Approval Criteria

HB 1457 imposes requirements that are inconsistent with established vaccine approval processes. For example:

- The bill demands a minimum one-year clinical trial with a placebo group, disregarding the decades of extensive scientific research that already inform vaccine safety and efficacy.

- It requires a risk assessment that ignores the overwhelming evidence that vaccine-preventable diseases pose far greater risks than vaccines themselves.
- It mandates manufacturer liability, which contradicts federal vaccine safety laws and may discourage the production of lifesaving immunizations.

Such provisions are not based on scientific consensus and will result in unnecessary delays in approving and administering vaccines, ultimately harming public health.

Undermining Public Confidence in Immunizations

By promoting unnecessary exemptions and misrepresenting the risks of vaccines, HB 1457 fuels misinformation and hesitancy, further reducing vaccine uptake. Schools should be places where science and public health are upheld, not where policy enables preventable diseases to re-emerge due to misinformation.

I urge this committee to reject HB 1457. Weakening immunization requirements for school attendance endangers children, undermines public health, and reverses decades of medical progress. North Dakota must continue to support policies that prioritize student safety and uphold science-based public health protections.