

Testimony of Alan O'Neil in support of HB-1548

To the House Human Services Committee

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 – 3 pm

Representative Ruby and members of the Human Services Committee.

My name is Alan O'Neil. I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of Unity Medical Center in Grafton, North Dakota. UMC consists of a Critical Access Hospital along with 2 Primary Care Clinics. I also serve on the North Dakota Hospital Association Board (Past Chair) and on the American Hospital Association Region 6 Policy Board (which includes 6 states - ND, Minn., SD, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri). The RPB meets quarterly and convenes annually in Washington D.C. to provide input to the AHA National Board on all matters regarding healthcare across the United States.

This bill was introduced by Representative Monson, Anderson, Christianson, Frelich, Sanford, Mitskog, O'Brien, Osowski, Murphy and Senators, Meyer and Myrdal.

I support House Bill 1548. A key strategy of all healthcare organizations nationwide is to promote/encourage activities which result in healthier individuals and healthier communities. This is an integral part of our Community Health Needs Assessment – which is a published study required of all public hospitals participating in the Medicare Program.

Population Health is a primary driver in healthcare these days. According to the AHA, two key components for improved Overall Community Health are driven by:

- 1. Physical and Mental Health**
- 2. Social and/or Spiritual Well-being**

Exercise on a consistent basis in a welcoming, contemporary environment will yield a Healthier Community. Obesity, Diabetes, Hypertension, Cardiac Conditions, Orthopedic Stress can all be minimized by a regular exercise routine. Unfortunately, North Dakota has a narrow window of weather supportive for many outdoor exercise activities. A shared indoor facility that welcomes the special needs of residents of the Life Skills and Transition Center, plus the community/region around Grafton would be an absolute win-win! Wouldn't it be great to hear testimony that the new Fitness Center has increased "physical activity" and reduced the "screen time" in our community!

Earlier in my career, I worked at the community hospital in Fairbanks, Alaska. I remember consistent winter temperatures in the minus 40 to minus 50 range. They had a "Fitness Center" such as the one being proposed. It was a "center" of the community and was very well utilized by residents of all ages. No matter the weather outside, the parking lot was always full!

This investment could very well be a "Pilot" for other North Dakota communities. Professionally speaking, recruitment in healthcare, along with other industries, is very competitive. We basically compete against all locations in the U.S. - most with much more moderate climates. Having a contemporary indoor Fitness Center would be a wonderful offering (recruiting tool) to potential candidates and their families. Thank you for your vision and support of HB – 1548.

Sincerely,



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