

Testimony
House Bill No. 1605
House Human Services Committee
Representative Matthew Ruby, Chairman
February 3, 2025

Chairman Ruby, and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Vanessa Bopp, Oral Health Community and Workforce Liaison with the Department of Health and Human Services (Department), Public Health Division. I appear before you in opposition of House Bill No. 1605.

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral and is released from rocks into the soil, water, and air. All water contains some fluoride. Usually, the fluoride level in water is not enough to prevent tooth decay (otherwise known as cavities) in most naturally occurring amounts. Community water fluoridation is the controlled addition of a fluoride compound to a public water supply to achieve a concentration level that is optimal to prevent cavities.

Fluoride helps to rebuild and strengthen the tooth's surface known as enamel. By keeping the tooth solid, fluoride stops cavities from forming and can even rebuild the tooth's surface. Community water fluoridation prevents cavities by providing frequent and consistent contact with low levels of fluoride.

Community water fluoridation is the most efficient and cost-effective way to deliver fluoride to everyone in a community, regardless of their age, income level, or educational attainment. Fluoridated water reduces cavities by about 25% in children and adults. This is particularly critical in parts of North Dakota where access to dental care may be limited. The

importance of fluoridation is highlighted by the following statistics regarding dental care access in North Dakota:

- Less than 50% of kindergarteners had a preventive dental visit in the past year.
- Nearly 1 in 3 adults did not have a dental visit in the last year.
- 80% of Medicaid-covered children under age 5 did not have a dental visit in the past year.

Community water fluoridation serves as a lifeline for these individuals, reducing disparities in oral health and preventing the pain and expense of untreated dental decay. Untreated tooth decay can cause pain, school or work absences, difficulty concentrating, and poor appearance – all contributing to decreased quality of life and ability to succeed. Tooth decay and its complications are preventable. One proven public health strategy is community access to optimal fluoride levels. Community water fluoridation is another tool to improve overall health across the lifespan.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.