

Testimony
House Bill No. 1621
Joint Policy Committee
Representative Matthew Ruby and Senator Judy Lee, Co-Chairman

January 21, 2026

Chairman Ruby and Chairman Lee, and members of the Joint Policy Committee, I am Krista Fremming, Interim Director of Medical Services with the Department of Health and Human Services. I appear before you in support of House Bill No. 1621, which was introduced as part of North Dakota's Rural Health Transformation Program, adding presidential physical fitness testing to the school curriculum. This legislation is a critical step toward improving the health and well-being of North Dakota's children, and ultimately, the future of our state.

Healthy habits that prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity begin in childhood. These conditions are largely preventable through healthy lifestyle choices, yet they continue to rise. Schools play a pivotal role in teaching children how to be physically active, which is an evidence-based strategy to combat declining health trends. Embedding fitness standards into the curriculum in North Dakota schools gives students the knowledge and tools to increase activity, establish healthy lifelong behaviors, and ultimately, decrease chronic disease risk.

The program provides appropriate age and gender benchmarks, ensuring students not only engage in physical activity but also learn how to assess, improve, and maintain their lifelong personal fitness. The program gives students a platform to celebrate personal

improvement, challenge themselves with national standards, and improve their abilities.

The environment built by the staff and schools will be the ultimate determiner of the programs inclusivity and HHS has confidence our local educators will rise to the occasion to create a positive learning environment.

The interim Rural Health Transformation committee has expressed support for this bill, and the state's commitment was highlighted in the Rural Health Transformation Program application submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Based on that application and the intention to pass this legislation, North Dakota received points and funding. Following through now is essential to honor that commitment and maintain approximately \$9 million in funds awarded over the next 5 years.

I urge you to support House Bill No. 1621 as an investment in our future. Physical fitness is foundational to ending chronic disease and ensuring that every child in North Dakota can thrive. Together, we can make physical fitness a cornerstone of our education system and a catalyst for a healthier North Dakota.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have.