

SamaritanTM

MINISTRIES

Chair Barta, and members of the committee,

Samaritan Ministries is one of the three largest national health care sharing ministries, and a founding member of the Alliance of Health Care Sharing Ministries. Samaritan was approved and accredited by the Health Care Sharing Accreditation Board in 2022, 2023, and again in 2024.

For over 30 years Samaritan Ministries has been serving its members, as Christians bear one another's burdens through health care sharing and that includes currently over 1500 individuals here in North Dakota. It is estimated that more than 4000 additional individuals are in similar ministries.

We support SB 2348 as it will remove any question that may arise in the future by recognizing that health care sharing ministries do not constitute the transaction of insurance business in North Dakota. 33 other states have already passed similar laws. Explicitly clarifying that health care sharing ministries are not subject to the insurance code will eliminate any confusion about jurisdiction, and as ministries, they are subject to the laws applicable to charities, enforced by the Attorney General.

Health care sharing ministries have been formed to help meet the health care cost needs of members by sharing funds voluntarily among other members of similar beliefs. The monthly amounts, or shares, each member contributes are sent to other members to help pay for their medical expenses and are administered by the health care sharing ministries, who function as clearinghouses for the shares.

Health care sharing ministries do not assume any risk or guarantee payment of medical bills and operate with voluntary cooperative sharing without a contractual transfer of risk. Health care sharing ministries also put a heavy priority on seeking to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of members through prayer and notes of encouragement from member to member.

Because of the unique nature of health care sharing ministries, well-meaning insurance regulators occasionally attempt to subject HCSMs to the same requirements as insurance companies. It is impossible to meet such standards without destroying the voluntary, ministerial nature of these ministries, and fighting the regulators in court is extremely expensive and strains the finances of the HCSM membership—who are already chosen, in many cases to live on a minister's salary. Additionally, the uncertainty created by such litigation can also harm the functioning of the ministry.

SB 2348 will also exempt public university students who are members of HCSMs from their school's insurance coverage requirement. These students are already having their health care expenses shared by their fellow HCSM members and should not be required to increase their higher education financial burden by being forced to purchase unnecessary insurance. Additionally, it is common for the entity that is processing the insurance waiver request to be the same company that sells university insurance.

We would ask that you support SB 2348 which will explicitly clarify the nature of HCSMs as ministries.

Joel Noble, Director of Public Policy, Samaritan Ministries, Int.