

Madam Chairwomen and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Senator Ryan Braunberger, representing Fargo's District 10. Today, we are addressing amendments to the North Dakota Century Code, as outlined in Senate Bill No. 2264. These changes aim to modernize our legal language and align our statute with the various relationships in North Dakota. This will also bring us in line with the Federal Respect for Marriage Act that was signed into law in 2022. Allow me to walk you through the key highlights of this critical legislation.

### **Language Modernization**

One of the most essential elements of this bill is the modernization of language across multiple legal provisions. By replacing outdated, gender-specific terms such as “husband and wife” with inclusive terminology like “two individuals married to each other” or “spouses,” we recognize the diversity of relationships in our society. These changes affirm that the law should serve everyone equally, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

### **Marriage Definition and Recognition**

The amendments redefine marriage to reflect it as a union between two consenting individuals, irrespective of gender. This modernized definition ensures that all legally valid marriages—performed here in North Dakota or other jurisdictions—are equally recognized under our laws. This is not just a legal update but a declaration of inclusion, ensuring that every married couple is afforded the same rights and respect.

### **Mutual Rights and Responsibilities**

Marriage comes with responsibilities, and our laws should reflect equality in these obligations. By revising terms in areas such as spousal duties, property ownership, and domicile, this legislation ensures that all individuals in a marriage are treated fairly and equitably. These updates provide clarity and consistency, fostering stronger, more balanced partnerships.

### **Legal Procedures and Exceptions**

The bill also addresses legal processes such as divorce, annulment, separation, and desertion. Inclusive language in these areas ensures that all individuals are treated with respect and that the law upholds fairness for all parties involved. Additionally, provisions related to adoption, surrogate agreements, and gestational carriers have been updated to reflect the evolving nature of families and parental roles in our society.

### **Property and Financial Matters**

Property rights and financial responsibilities are central to marital relationships. This bill modernizes homestead exemptions, property transfers, and taxation provisions to reflect spouses' equality. It ensures that both individuals in a marriage have equal standing in financial and property matters, strengthening economic security for families.

### **Specific Statutory Amendments**

Finally, the amendments span multiple North Dakota Century Code chapters, addressing family leave, fishing licenses, adoption, and spousal privilege in legal proceedings. By revising these statutes, we ensure consistency across the legal framework and uphold the principle of fairness in every aspect of life.

### **Conclusion**

Members of the Judiciary Committee, this bill is not just about changing words; it is about changing lives. It is about ensuring that our laws reflect the values of equality, respect, and dignity that we hold dear. By embracing these amendments, we send a clear message: North Dakota is a state that values fairness and recognizes the humanity of all its citizens.

Let us move forward, ensuring our laws serve everyone equally and justly. I will gladly take any questions.