

Dear Committee Members,

I would like to voice my concern regarding the use of wastewater surveillance of COVID-19 to inform public health guidelines and restrictions. Despite claims to the contrary, there is a big difference between testing wastewater in order to protect citizens from contamination and surveilling wastewater in order to protect citizens from each other. North Dakota is participating in wastewater surveillance across the state, including on the campus of NDSU, which led to coerced clinical testing and quarantining of asymptomatic students. According to the CDC, it is not currently possible to reliably and accurately predict the number of infected individuals in a community based on sewage testing, yet this form of surveillance is being used to inform public policy decisions and has the potential to greatly infringe on the rights of citizens beyond college campuses and in regards to other communicable diseases. Citizens are wise to be wary of unelected officials using data with the intended goal of assisting governors and mayors in their decisions to implement lockdowns and isolation policies - particularly because our government has become habitually tyrannical under the banner of COVID-19. Over the last year, we have seen a trend emerge. Emergency is declared. Next, extreme policies are implemented in the name of safety at all costs and with no regard for the infringement on civil liberties. We must return to an America where government serves, rather than subjugates, its citizens.

Until reliability and efficacy of this new public health tool are demonstrated, implementing wastewater screening for COVID-19 to target public health resources, to require testing, to impose restrictions on movement, or to remove restrictions based on an absence of virus in the wastewater is premature at best. Even if reliability and efficacy are established, the legal and moral ramifications must be strongly and thoroughly considered before implementation. At the very least, there should be a public hearing and vote of approval by citizens before the implementation of wastewater surveillance for COVID-19. Please render a DO PASS on HB 1298.

Thank you for your leadership and service to the state of North Dakota

Mark Holter