



**Joint Technical Corrections Committee**  
**Senator Judy Lee and Representative Robin Weisz, chairpersons**  
**Nov. 9, 2021**  
**HB 1511**

Chairpersons Lee and Weisz and members of the committee: My name is Steven Weiser. I am a long tenured emergency room physician and I serve as President for Altru Health Systems in Grand Forks. I also serve as board chair for the Health Policy Consortium, a healthcare advocacy group that includes Altru Health, Trinity Health in Minot and Sanford Health in Fargo and Bismarck. Collectively we provide 80 percent of the acute healthcare services in North Dakota.

On behalf of my HPC colleagues I would like to thank each of you for your support and your leadership. As you know, providing high-quality healthcare in a rural state is uniquely challenging. But while other states struggle through hospital closures and shrinking access to care, North Dakota's hospitals are supported by sound policy decisions.

We are at a crossroads where we again look to you to make an important policy decision that will greatly impact how hospitals can – and cannot – keep our staff and our patients safe from preventable diseases. The mission of a hospital is to provide the greatest level of care to its patients. To do so, healthcare workers are required to comply with many safety and infection prevention control measures, including vaccinations. Because COVID-19 vaccines, a proven way to fight the spread of COVID-19, has been horribly politicized, you are being pressured to pass a law that prevents businesses ability to require it. Please resist the pressure to do that and *please vote no on House Bill 1511.*

The consequences of passing vaccine-related legislation at this time, especially policies that impede our ability to keep employees and patients healthy, will unquestionably result in more hospital-acquired infections, longer hospital stays and more death. North Dakota hospitals have been struggling to keep up with an increased demand for acute care for over 18 months. There could not be a worse time to take away our most powerful tool to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Please know that as health care providers across the state have implemented vaccine mandates for their employees, it has been done with the utmost consideration for the health and safety of those employees and patients served. Mandating vaccines has been considered carefully along with individual rights. Exemptions for religious and medical reasons have been thoughtfully respected. To protect our staff and the patients we serve, we continue to use every available tool known to prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 including wearing masks and visitor restrictions.

Our physicians, nurses, and other vital frontline health care workers are doing heroic work for our communities despite shortages in staff that predate the pandemic and have grown because of it. We are immensely proud of and grateful for their work and the sacrifices made daily to care for others.

Vaccination requirements for health care providers and staff are not new. Hospitals have long required vaccinations for measles, mumps, rubella, chicken pox and influenza with remarkable impact on staff and patient safety. As is the COVID-19 vaccine, these immunizations are well-researched, safe and provide extensive protection from the greater risk of illness.

Removing a private business' ability to require a vaccine for employees would jeopardize the ability of our hospitals and clinics to safely treat those under our care. Further, creating legislation at a time when the pandemic is still spreading throughout our communities could negatively impact a future need or critical decision that ultimately protects our community from greater harm and loss.

Our state's health care providers, while strained, are working tirelessly to provide critical care for our citizens. We respectfully ask that you protect healthcare providers' abilities and decisions to continue the fight against this pandemic and keep our communities safe and sound.

Please vote no on this bill and others that limit an employer's right to do what is in the best interests of their employees and of those to whom they provide services. This bill would force healthcare providers to take a huge step backward in proven infection control practices, hamstringing providers at a time when every hospital in the state is stressed trying to keep up with demand for hospital and emergency care.

Sincerely,  
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