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Good morning, Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee. My name is Dr. Nizar Wehbi. I am North Dakota State Health Officer.

I am providing testimony in opposition to HB1505. This legislation will negatively impact the health of North Dakotans by eliminating all routine vaccination requirements in North Dakota, including those for childcare settings, schools, universities and healthcare facilities.

Childcare, school, university and healthcare immunization requirements play an important role in maintaining the health and safety of children, students and patients. Measles is so contagious that experts recommend a 95% vaccination rate to prevent outbreaks from occurring. If childcare, school and university immunization requirements are discontinued, vaccination rates may decline, placing North Dakotans at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases.

North Dakota already has one of the most relaxed childcare and school immunization policies in the United States. NDCC 23-07-17.1 allows medical, religious and moral/philosophical exemptions. To claim a religious, moral/philosophical exemption, parents simply have to sign a document before school entry. North Dakota universities also allow the same exemptions to their vaccination requirements for measles and meningitis.

North Dakota is one of only 15 states that still allow moral/philosophical exemptions; many of the other states that allow philosophical exemptions require a notary signature or education from a healthcare provider before claiming an exemption. Six states allow medical exemptions and don't offer religious or philosophical exemptions.<sup>1</sup> States that have easily obtained personal belief exemptions have higher rates of pertussis and measles.<sup>2,3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [States With Religious and Philosophical Exemptions From School Immunization Requirements \(ncsl.org\)](https://www.ncsl.org/legislative-analysis/family-childcare/religious-philosophical-exemptions-from-school-immunization-requirements.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> [Nonmedical Exemptions to School Immunization Requirements: Secular Trends and Association of State Policies With Pertussis Incidence | Infectious Diseases | JAMA | JAMA Network](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26111111/)

<sup>3</sup> [Individual and community risks of measles and pertussis associated with personal exemptions to immunization - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26111111/)

HB1505 will also impact employers who may need to require certain vaccines to protect their employees. Examples of immunization requirements that may be impacted are law enforcement, who need to be vaccinated against hepatitis B in the event of a needle stick, restaurant workers who may need to be vaccinated against hepatitis A if exposed, and veterinarians who need to be protected against rabies. There are likely many other examples.

Before immunizations were available, diseases like diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, polio, *Haemophilus influenzae* type B and rubella caused severe illness, hospitalization and death in the United States. Before 1963, when the measles vaccination program started, it is estimated that 3 to 4 million people in the United States were infected with measles each year. Also, each year among reported cases, an estimated 400 to 500 people died, 48,000 were hospitalized, and 1,000 suffered encephalitis (swelling of the brain) from measles.<sup>4</sup> Because of the successes of vaccines, many people have forgotten these vaccine-preventable diseases and their negative health consequences.

In 2017, the Minnesota Department of Health spent \$2.3 million in five months responding to an outbreak of 79 cases of measles.<sup>5</sup> Columbus, Ohio is currently responding to a measles outbreak of 85 cases, 36 hospitalized. None of the cases occurred in fully vaccinated children, four occurred in children partially vaccinated, and one case has an unknown vaccination status. Twenty-five cases occurred in children under the age of one, too young to be vaccinated. Over 17 childcare facilities and schools have been impacted.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, current vaccination laws and policies in North Dakota for childcare, schools and universities provide simple ways for parents and/or students to submit for an exemption. Maintaining high rates of routine, wellness vaccinations is necessary to keep North Dakotans protected against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

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<sup>4</sup> [About Measles Vaccination | CDC](#)

<sup>5</sup> [MN Health Dept. Spent \\$2.3M During 5-Month Measles Outbreak – WCCO | CBS Minnesota \(cbslocal.com\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Measles Public Report | Tableau Public](#)