

## Testimony in opposition of HB 1200

**Relating to COVID-19 vaccinations and emergency-use authorized vaccines for students at institutions of higher education; and to amend and reenact subsection 1 of section 23-07-17.1 and section 23-12-20 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to school and day care immunizations and COVID-19 vaccination and infection information.**

**Senate Human Services March 8, 2023**

Senator Lee and committee members. My name is Stephen McDonough. I am providing testimony in opposition to HB1200.

I am a board certified pediatrician who worked in North Dakota for forty years, from 1980 to 2020. I worked at the NDDoH from 1985 to 2000 and served at times as the State Epidemiologist, AIDS/Project Director, Director of Maternal and Child Health and Chief Medical Officer. During the 1980s and 1990s, North Dakota had one of the best immunization programs in the country and was one of a handful of states to escape measles cases during the national measles outbreak of 1989 to 1990<sup>1</sup> and was the first state to eradicate Haemophilus influenzae type b infection known as Hib, the most common cause of childhood meningitis at the time.<sup>2</sup>

This bill is one of several supported by an anti-science crowd who spread misinformation and falsehoods about immunizations. North Dakota has learned precious little from our experience in 2020 when we had the highest COVID death rate in the world for many weeks. The immunization misinformation spread by social media and right-wing news media in 2021 resulted in our state having one of the lowest COVID immunization rates in the US.

So how many North Dakotans died of COVID because they didn't get the vaccine? An analysis by the Brown University School of Public Health estimated that **650 North Dakotans died a vaccine-preventable COVID death by April of 2022.**<sup>3</sup> COVID vaccine are very safe and highly effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths.

The North Dakota Legislature should be evaluating ways to counteract vaccine misinformation. HB 1200 needs to be amended or defeated.

Stephen McDonough MD

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control. Measles- United States, 1989 and First 20 weeks 1990. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 39:353-393 June 1, 1990

<sup>2</sup> Bisgard KM, Kao A, Leake J, Strelbel PM, Perkins BA and Wharton M. Haemophilus influenzae Invasive Disease in the United States, 1994-1995: Near Disappearance of a Vaccine-preventable Childhood Disease. *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 4:229- 237, 1998 April-June

<sup>3</sup> Simmons-Duffin S and Nakajima K (2022, May 13). This is how many lives could have been saved with COVID vaccinations in each state. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/05/13/1098071284/this-is-how-many-lives-could-have-been-saved-with-covid-vaccinations-in-each-sta>