

1155 Oxbow Ct,
Grand Forks, ND 58203

March 11, 2023

Re: HB 1390

Senate Chair Lee and Members of the North Dakota Senate Human Services Committee:

I strongly support HB 1390, the establishment of a suicide fatality review board for suicide deaths in North Dakota. I have presented testimony as part of the House version and remain committed to the need for this committee in North Dakota.

I am a forensic pathologist, Chair of Pathology at UND, Coroner of Grand Forks County, and designated forensic pathologist for 21 Eastern counties in ND by the State Forensic Examiner in Bismarck. For over 40 years, my medical practice is the specialized area of forensic pathology – finding the cause, manner, and circumstances of death. I attend death scene in my County and provide Forensic Pathology services to regional Coroners in ND. Critical to this medical practice is assessment of preventability of deaths and feedback for public health and safety initiatives to reduced these deaths. This panel, drawn largely of citizen volunteers, each with a particular area of interest and expertise, can start to address this growing epidemic.

Suicide likely has (or will) affect every person in this room. When you experience the devastation these deaths have to family, friends, society, it becomes imperative to act. The demographics, triggers, risks, and signs of suicide are evolving. Panels like the one proposed provide an effective mechanism to study these evolving variables, recommend, create and monitor effectiveness. Panels such as these are more diverse and effective then single agencies, no matter how dedicated, can be. The synergy of panel and broad base of involvement is the very key to success in other areas and in other locals.

Many of the supporters work with families daily as they try to process the unfathomable events. Some of us, like myself, may have to deliver the shattering news that guts a family, forever changing the soul of family members. I am still haunted by the wails of parents losing a child to a preventable and unimaginable consequence. We can do better. We must do better.

Please recommend a “DO PASS” for this important step to support North Dakota citizens.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Ann Sens, MD, PhD