

Hello, Chair Lee and Members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Brenda Stallman. I am the Executive Director of Traill District Health Unit in Hillsboro. I am here in opposition to SB 2274.

A favorite activity of mine is to exit the highway while traveling and visit small little towns in ND that I have not yet been to, and invariably I find some treasure that makes me glad I stopped.

I would like to give you a quick tour of my little town of Hillsboro. So glad you took the time to veer off I-29 35 miles north of Fargo and join me as I introduce you to some very special people.

First, lets stop by the Traill County Courthouse, where our public health office is located and home to 3 experienced public health nurses. Meet Kelly and Chris, each with 25 plus years of public health experience. For me to keep them safe in their positions, I must ask them to be vaccinated against Hepatitis b, as they vaccinate our county residents and run the risk of a needle stick injury that could transfer the dangerous virus to their blood stream. Chronic hepatitis b is a serious liver infection that can develop into a dangerous disease, resulting in liver damage, liver failure, liver cancer, and even death.

Next door, meet Sheriff Steve. He is a cancer survivor, and we are grateful he is healthy and back to looking out for our safety and security. His immune status is compromised, making him more susceptible to vaccine preventable diseases. Steve

rarely has a full staff, as finding qualified peace officers is difficult. He and his deputies are frequently spit on and/or bitten and run a high risk, also, of contracting diseases transmitted through body fluids. Hepatitis b vaccinations are critical to this at-risk group of employees, as are first responders, firefighters, and ambulance crews.

Let's continue our tour. Meet Marty, our funeral director. He and his staff are at high risk for exposure to blood borne viruses in the course of their work. Vaccinations are necessary for those who handle cadavers and human remains.

Hillsboro is fortunate to now have our own veterinarian practice. Meet Scott, who opened his practice 6 years ago, and employs technicians to assist him with vaccinations, exams, and surgeries. It is imperative for Scott and his staff to be vaccinated against rabies for which there is no cure if contracted from a rabid animal. An animal does not always show signs of rabies and can pass the disease on to an unsuspecting person. Once symptoms of rabies occur, it is nearly always fatal.

Probably one of the most popular individuals in Hillsboro, or at least the one most highly sought, is Tom. He is an outstanding plumber and employs apprentice and journeymen plumbers that deal, as you know, with human waste and sewage. Tetanus vaccinations, as well as shots for Hepatitis A and B are necessary in their line of work. Hepatitis A causes liver inflammation, reducing the ability for the liver to function, and is spread through contaminated food and water.

Next, our school. Over 500 students in Pre K – grade 12. Within our school, you will find long-term janitorial supervisor, Steve. Another cancer survivor with a compromised immune system, and one of the friendliest guys around. Janitors have a high risk of

being exposed to hepatitis a and b. These 500 students all face a higher risk of vaccine-preventable diseases, due to close proximity, poor respiratory and restroom hygiene, and highly mobile activity levels taking them from town to town. Covid is just one disease that kept school administrators, teachers, and public health professionals busy day and night as we did our best to keep sick staff and students away from those who were not ill. Imagine 11 more vaccine preventable diseases circulating, because of no longer requiring proof of vaccinations. There would be no time to teach, nor enough students and staff present to keep the schools open. To achieve herd immunity for measles, 95% of the population must be vaccinated or have had the disease. If we are not at that high level, measles will be a real threat. And we are already seeing this in areas of unvaccinated populations.

And finally, let me introduce you to our community's most vulnerable population. Our clinic, hospital, and nursing home is where an already over-stretched medical staff takes care of our sick, immunocompromised and chronically ill.

Melissa works with the senior population that needs help with managing their diabetes and other conditions that jeopardize their ability to stay safely in their homes. She has had two kidney transplants and cannot risk being exposed to a vaccine preventable illness that could lead to rejection of her kidney. Residents of the LTC facility run the gamut of chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease that make them more vulnerable to transmission of viruses and bacteria that are life threatening.

So now you have met some of the many people needed to keep our town of Hillsboro thriving. Many are operating on a very fine margin between success and conversely, closure, due to staffing shortages, or the expenses of doing business. By imposing on

them the threat of just one employee becoming seriously ill due to lack of a vaccination is a risk that is careless, unnecessary, and dangerous. Imagine these horrible diseases, once halted due to life saving vaccines, sweeping through a community like Hillsboro with no ability to determine who is protected and who is not. And of course, these circulating diseases are not confined within the walls of one community.

Imagine the liability of an employer who does not provide or require the necessary vaccines vital to keep his/her staff safe. In our litigation possessed society, we as employees would be first line targets of a lawsuit in the case of a work-related illness that was preventable with a vaccine not required based on best practices.

So my little town is no different than any other town in ND. Hard working, well-trained, and good intentioned citizens look to all of us to do what we can to keep our towns vitalized and safe.

There is one more person I wanted you to meet, but unfortunately he's not here. Nor does he have plans to return. I am talking about my son, Brady. He has a year remaining in his ER physician residency. My dream was that he would finish his training and return to ND. He has informed me that he cannot work in a state that keeps him from using the tools that he needs and that are recommended to give his patients the best care he can. In this case those tools are required vaccines.

Thank you for hearing my testimony in opposition to SB 2274.