

Respected Chairperson Lee and Committee Members,

My name is Parveen Wahab, and I am a pediatric hospitalist physician at CHI St. Alexius Health in Bismarck. I am here today to express my opposition to SB 2274

As someone who has dedicated my career to the health and well-being of my patients, I am deeply concerned about the impact this bill could have on public health. It would criminalize a core function of public health by making the implementation of any vaccination a felony with severe penalties. This would make all immunization requirements for employers, healthcare facilities, schools, universities, and other settings where diseases can spread ineffective.

Vaccination is a critical tool in the fight against infectious diseases and effectively reduces the spread of disease and saves lives. We have already seen the re-emergence of polio and measles virus in the United States. Such diseases have safe and effective vaccines that have been proven to control the transmission of these dangerous viruses. Widespread uptake of vaccination is necessary for the achievement of herd immunity and the protection of public health. However, if the unvaccinated become a protected class, the spread of such diseases will likely escalate, putting everyone at risk. Especially our children and the immune-compromised. It also puts healthcare providers at risk who is at the forefront of fighting this disease.

Vaccination status is not considered a protected status under discrimination laws because it is not a characteristic intrinsic to an individual's identity, such as race, religion, or gender. Instead, vaccination is a medical intervention that individuals choose to undergo based on their beliefs and circumstances. By conflating the two, we risk diluting the protections of truly vulnerable individuals.

In conclusion, I strongly oppose the proposed bill to make vaccination status a protected status. This bill would have devastating consequences for public health and undermine the very foundation of our healthcare system. I urge our lawmakers to consider the potential impact on public health and reject this proposal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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