

## Testimony in Support of House Bill 1387

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Good morning Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Mark Jorritsma and I am the Executive Director of Family Policy Alliance of North Dakota. I am testifying in support of House Bill 1387, and respectfully request that you render a “DO PASS” on this bill.

### An Epidemic of Child Abuse

Child abuse is a tragedy that we as a society cannot abide. Child abuse is when a parent or caregiver, whether through action or failing to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm or risk of serious harm to a child. There are many forms of child abuse and maltreatment, including neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation and emotional abuse.<sup>1</sup>

### Child abuse in the US

Over the years, child abuse has grown in magnitude and most likely also frequency of reporting. Here are some sobering facts about child abuse in our country.

In FFY 2019, there were nationally 656,000 victims of child abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup> Based on 2018 statistics, other facts about child abuse include:<sup>3</sup>

- 1,770 children died from abuse and neglect in 2018.
- 91.7% of victims are maltreated by one or both parents.
- The highest rate of child abuse is in children under age one.

### Child Abuse in North Dakota

As for North Dakota, “The most commonly used criminal laws applied to child sexual abuse are located in NDCC, Chapter 12.1-20. Commonly applied laws are gross sexual imposition, continuous sexual abuse of a child, sexual assault, corruption or solicitation of minors, luring minors by computer, incest, indecent exposure, promoting obscenity to minors, minor performing in obscene performance and human trafficking.”<sup>4</sup>

“In 2018, the ND Department of Human Services responded to 1307 reports of suspected child sexual abuse. In 2017, the North Dakota Attorney General’s Office reported 587 child sexual abuse victims, North Dakota Children’s Advocacy Centers interviewed 826 children who presented primarily for sexual abuse, and North Dakota crisis centers provided services to 364 child sexual abuse victims.”<sup>5</sup>

### **What Do We Do about it?**

There are many suggested preventative measures to stop child abuse. Some of these include early childhood home visiting, improving access to child abuse education, and advocacy. All these and more preventative measures notwithstanding, we think it is an unfortunate reality that child abuse will continue nationwide as well as in our state for the foreseeable future. Thus, one way to supplement the prevention of child abuse is by improving/easing reporting mechanisms if it occurs.

House Bill 1387 would help in this regard. Extending the time period for child abuse reporting could be one way of helping to address this issue in our state. One can make the case that the more time that elapses between the act of child abuse and reporting, the more difficult details may be to recall. On the other hand, the potential to stop additional potential abuse and/or ultimately serve justice for crimes committed lends itself to a bill like this. We believe that the good from a bill such as this outweighs any potential downside.

### **The New Face of Child Abuse**

One type of child abuse more recent in our country is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In today’s environment, FGM would likely be done under the guise of providing a female child with gender identity options. However, gender-reassignment surgery is simply the West’s version of FGM that has been a chronic problem worldwide for years. It is appropriate that the Century Code already addresses such practices.

We believe that extending the time period for legal action by a victim of FGM is a good idea. FGM is fundamentally non-reversible, not unlike other experiences of child abuse. It will haunt the victim for the rest of her life. It seems only appropriate that the period for justice be extended for such a significant crime.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask you to vote House Bill 1387 out of committee with a “DO PASS” recommendation.

I would now be happy to stand for any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.childhelp.org/child-abuse/#:~:text=Child%20abuse%20is%20when%20a,abuse%2C%20exploitation%20and%20emotional%20abuse.>

<sup>2</sup> Child Maltreatment 2019, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

<sup>3</sup> <https://americanspcc.org/child-abuse-statistics/#:~:text=National%20Child%20Abuse%20Statistics,by%20one%20or%20both%20parents.>

<sup>4</sup> North Dakota Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report, November 2018

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*