

## TESTIMONY SUPPORT OF SB2024 - Support for funding BreatheND

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### DR. JOHN WARFORD – AND FORMER BISMARCK CITY MAYOR

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#### Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

You've heard the words "comprehensive statewide tobacco prevention program" a few times today. I'm here today to share my personal experiences that speak to what that means and why it's the best way to reduce the toll tobacco takes on North Dakota.

I've held a variety of roles in the Bismarck-Mandan community over the years.

- I served as the mayor of Bismarck from 2002-2014.
- I've practiced orthodontics for 43 years and counting.
- And I am currently the Dean of the Gary Tharaldson School of Business at the University of Mary.

In each of those areas of the community, I've watched BreatheND make a meaningful impact. Let's start with my orthodontics practice as I've been there the longest- since 1973.

- Every day I average 75-100 patients.
- Which means I have personally seen and treated a large portion of the oral health needs in the Bis-Man community.
- Before BreatheND's efforts, a significant portion of my patients- men and women, teenagers and adults- suffered from serious health effects caused by tobacco products.
  - I saw many cases of leukoplakia, the thickened, white patches that form inside the mouth.
  - A handful of my patients were even diagnosed with oral cancer.
    - That was particularly prevalent for patients using smokeless tobacco.

*After BreatheND embarked on educational efforts, I saw a direct and dramatic decline in use and oral manifestations.*

Then, as Mayor, I watched the process at work. In 2010, BreatheND worked with us to develop a smoke-free ordinance that included bars in the city.

- In 2011, a special election was held and 60% of the voters opted to keep the smoke-free ordinance.
- This was big step forward for city officials to protect all citizens from second-hand smoke and encourage the cessation of tobacco users.
- The public education efforts of BreatheND were instrumental in the creation and sustaining of the ordinance through the vote.
- The ordinance worked to protect the citizens of Bismarck.
- I attribute that to the success of BreatheND and the courage of the Bismarck City Commission to stand up against Big Tobacco and the hospitality bar industry, and put health first.

I'm now serving as Dean of University of Mary's school of business, where I've continued to watch BreatheND positively impact the lives of young people.

- The program worked closely with student government and the student population to achieve a tobacco-free status.
- I enjoy working on a tobacco-free campus, which means a healthy workplace for myself and my colleagues, and a healthy environment for students to learn.
- I also recognize the important example this sets for the 18-22-year-olds on our campus.
  - We are instilling healthy behaviors for these young people to have even brighter futures.

My experience with BreatheND tells the story of the many levels on which this program works.

- Changing cultural norms about the use of tobacco is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We need education, policy work, and strong partnerships.
- We need to respond to the changing cultures of one generation to the next.
- That's why BreatheND is aggressive and creative about its educational efforts, from working with college students to building relationships with city officials.
- And that's just here in Bismarck.
- These comprehensive efforts are happening all over the state.

I can actually see the results of all this work at my practice. I have fewer patients suffering serious oral health conditions caused by tobacco than ever before.

I fully support full funding for BreatheND to continue this multi-layered approach. I'm encouraged by the program's successes thus far and excited for what the future will bring.

It's important to remember that BreatheND is about prevention, and not treatment reach. No other agency can do this work. The difference is that treatment reach impacts those already suffering. Tobacco prevention means that North Dakota will save money and lives, by having to address fewer chronic diseases caused by tobacco – the leading cause of preventable death and disease.