

March 9, 2021

Chair Weisz and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

My name is Ellen Schafer. I live in Bismarck and I am an advocacy volunteer and member of AARP North Dakota's Executive Council. I am testifying this morning in support of SB 2209 that outlines the process for the safe, legal wholesale importation of prescription drugs from Canada.

The rising cost of prescription drugs impacts all North Dakotans but hits older North Dakotans particularly hard. Most Medicare beneficiaries live on relatively modest incomes. Their ability to absorb increasingly expensive prescription drugs is nearly impossible. Many of my friends, neighbors and family talk about the difficult decisions about how to live because of the price of those drugs.

My sister was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia. The medication used to treat her leukemia is called Sprycel. When I testified in support of the drug importation bill in the Senate Human Services Committee, her medication cost \$15,000 per month. As of January, this year, the medication she now needs costs \$18,000. She is retired and cannot afford this medication. The doctor placed her on a catastrophic list and which has helped her obtain a grant to pay for this medication. The dollar amount of her grant is a total of \$8,000.00 per calendar year which only helps her cover 5 months of this medication. After her insurance and the grant loan she still will have to pay \$5,677 out of her pocket.

She is very worried if she can't obtain another grant how she will pay for this medication. If she is required to pay for the medication herself, she will have to quit this life saving medication. She is retired and cannot afford this medication. The doctor placed her on a catastrophic list and which has helped her obtain a grant to pay for this medication. The cost of her medication will now be covered until December of 2021. After that she is not sure what will happen. If she is required to pay for the medication herself, she will have to quit this life saving medication.

Another drug the doctor has ordered for her is a respiratory inhaler called Trilogy to help her breathing. This medication currently costs \$450.00 a month. She had to quit taking it because she cannot afford to pay for it.

My sister is not alone, AARP research shows that between 2012 and 2017, the average annual cost of prescription drug treatment increased 57.8%, while the annual income of North Dakotans only increased 6.7%. In AARP's 2020 survey of North Dakota adults, 44% of respondents decided not to fill a prescription that their doctor had given them because of the drug's cost. We cannot afford higher drug prices and bills like these would provide more affordable options to bring down the price.

Thank you again for listening to mine and other AARP members concerns as you work on this issue. I wholeheartedly appreciate any effort to make medicine more affordable. These bills are a step in the right direction and I hope you give at least one of these bills a favorable recommendation.

Thank you.