My name is Chelsea Markwald, and I am a lifelong Minnesota resident and parent to 3 children submitting testimony in opposition to SF3439. I have followed public-health guidance my entire life and received every vaccine available to me, often as soon as new vaccines came on the market. In my early twenties, after receiving a flu shot, I ended up in the emergency room with pneumonia. Later, while completing the HPV vaccine series, I developed severe joint and pelvic pain that felt like fire—pain so debilitating that after a lifetime of dance, I could no longer sit, sleep, or walk comfortably. When I asked my physician why someone might choose not to receive the HPV vaccine, I was told there was no reason not to, and no risks were discussed. These experiences permanently changed my health and deeply informed my religious convictions about bodily integrity, informed consent, and the responsibility parents have to protect their children.

Those convictions now directly affect my three children, whom I homeschool. SF3439 would eliminate all conscientious exemptions for every child in Minnesota, including homeschoolers, removing the ability of parents to make individualized medical decisions for their own children based on faith, medical history, and conscience. Our state and federal constitutions have long recognized the importance of religious liberty and the fundamental role of parents in directing the care and upbringing of their children. Parents are the ones who know their children best, who love them most, and who bear the lifelong responsibility for their well-being. This bill replaces parental judgment with a one-size-fits-all mandate and leaves no room for families with unique circumstances. If SF3439 passes as written, my family would have no choice but to leave Minnesota and move to a neighboring state to continue homeschooling and caring for our children according to our faith and conscience.

I respectfully ask you to protect long-standing conscientious exemptions and to oppose or amend SF3439 so that families are not forced to choose between compliance and conscience. Preserving exemptions allows Minnesota to safeguard public health while also honoring religious liberty, parental rights, and the diversity of families who call this state home.