

Health and Human Services Committee
Confirmation Hearing – Dr. Thomas Williams
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Thomas Williams, MD
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Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Good afternoon Sen. Riepe and members of the HHS Committee. I'm Thomas Williams (T-H-O-M-A-S W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S). I'm Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health for the Department of Health and Human Services. I started serving in this position on November 1, 2016.

It's an honor to join Courtney Phillips and the team at DHHS. I have found the culture to be warm and welcoming.

Public health touches the life of every Nebraskan – clean air and water, less disease, healthy schools, communities and workplaces, quality care at safe health care facilities and preparing for natural disasters and public health emergencies.

The department offers a way to help people live better lives that is diverse and broad – an opportunity to help whole populations versus a single patient.

With my wide-ranging experience and heart for public service, I'm poised to move the division of public health forward.

I'd like to touch briefly on my background.

My life has been in Nebraska. I grew up here in Lincoln and worked in the shadow of the Capitol in high school and college at my father's auto store on 11th St.

The science of medicine always fascinated me. I knew I wanted to do something in science at a very early age and by the time I got to high school, medicine became the clear choice.

I received my undergraduate degree in Chemistry from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and my medical degree from the University of Nebraska College of Medicine.

I'm an anatomic and clinical pathologist with subspecialty expertise in Chemical Pathology. Before coming to DHHS, I practiced at Methodist Hospital in Omaha for 38 years, serving as Laboratory Medical Director and Chair of the Department of Pathology for the last 22 where I worked to ensure professional excellence in laboratory and medical practice and create a

collaborative and friendly workplace culture. There is a great team at Methodist and we all are fortunate to have a great team here at DHHS.

I'm also an Assistant Professor of Pathology at UNMC.

I'm a member of the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute Board of Directors and a member of the Omaha Metropolitan Medical Response System where I've co-chaired committees responsible for emergency communications for metro Omaha health care facilities and laboratory infection control and surveillance.

I've served as laboratory director or consulting pathologist for several Greater Nebraska hospitals and have been involved in working groups and advisory committees at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

I met my wife Sue at Lincoln Southeast High School and we've been married for 45 years. We have two great adult children adopted from Korea – Rachel who has her MPA and works at an advertising agency in Omaha and Nicholas who is on the spectrum and has worked for six years at Walmart in Omaha. Two bearded collies, Lexi and Ellie, are also part of the family.

I'm energized by the transformation that's happening at DHHS and in my short time here have seen the teams' commitment to becoming a more effective, efficient and customer-focused agency.

We've prioritized a customer-friendly process for the approximately 176,000 health care professionals we license each year. Simplified applications, streamlined screening processes and faster turnaround times all are improvements recently made to several licensing areas and there's more to come.

Accreditation is another key driver for public health departments to continuously improve their performance and quality. DHHS achieved national public health accreditation in 2016 showing we have high-performing public health programs and services meeting the needs of Nebraska communities and citizens.

Public health accreditation efforts are happening across the entire state public health system. Our team is providing support to local health departments that are pursuing national accreditation.

Part of the work we do focuses on prevention and promoting good health. We're continuing our efforts to promote wellness across the state.

A commitment to daily exercise for over 40 years has truly changed my life. My hope is for all Nebraskans to enjoy the benefits that come with embracing a healthy and active lifestyle including better health outcomes and quality of life.

From Ebola to flooding and tornadoes, DHHS, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, local health departments and partners like UNMC/Nebraska Medicine play a critical role in preparing for and responding to public health emergencies and natural disasters.

Through my work in Douglas County with the Omaha Metropolitan Medical Response System, I know that preparedness planning is a constant. There is always something on the horizon. We will maintain our strong relationships and continue to work together to further increase our level of preparedness and help protect the health and safety of Nebraskans.

Any accomplishments are a team effort and a great team will do great things. Team DHHS is motivated, competent and caring and my goal is to nourish and support them as we move public health ahead and help Nebraskans live better and healthier lives.

I appreciate being here before the committee today and look forward to working with you. Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.