

**Testimony**  
**House Bill 1012 – Development Homes, Inc.**  
**House Appropriations – Human Resources Division**  
**Hon. Jon Nelson, Chairman**  
**January 25, 2021**

Good morning Chairman Nelson and other distinguished Committee members;

My name is Scott Anderson, Program Service Director for Development Homes, Inc. (DHI) from Grand Forks, ND. I am honored and grateful to have his opportunity to speak with you on behalf of DHI, other ND Community Providers, and all the people we serve and support. The focus of my testimony will be to speak to the importance of the quality support and services we as Community Providers do each and every day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to serve and support others in the great state of ND.

Development Homes, Inc.(DHI) was established in 1974 supporting children and 46 years later we continue to serve children, along with adults and families as well. Our mission: “Development Homes, Inc. is committed to the provision of quality community based support services to person with disabilities, enabling them to maximize their individual potential, and fulfill their personal dreams.” DHI provides a variety of services to about 170 unique individuals and we employ about 500 staff. DHI is currently the 8<sup>th</sup> largest employer in our Grand Forks community. The people we support, our organization and our staff, have a significant financial impact on our community. With the continued support from this legislature, DHI and every other provider will continue to provide opportunities for people to have the quality lives that we all aspire to have.

In March of 2020, the impact COVID-19 In ND reached a level that impacted each and every community across the state. Our schools were closed to all in-school education and the all too familiar term of “distance learning” was established and implemented. For all parents and those providers who support children, of which DHI is one, the impact was immediate and without precedent. The announcement was made on March 15, 2020 that kids would not be going to their school building for education starting the very next day, March 16, 2020. The determination and dedication of parents and providers to forge ahead with providing immediate educational support to our children was remarkable. At DHI, we were supporting 12 kids in placements living outside the family home. Most of the kids we support in that environment are in need of significant staff support, with most receiving a staff designated to support each child individually. The needed support, just within DHI, would be 10-12 staff working an additional eight (8) hours per day, five (5) days per week for the next 11 weeks. This totals approximately 4,000 to 5000 hours of unscheduled staffing time and the task of providing that support started the very next day. Several other providers across the state were also thrust into “stepping up” immediately to support many children during daytime, school hours. With the very common and prevalent “can-do” attitude, providers across the state were able to meet this challenge and provide the needed support for our kids. This event truly exemplifies the caring and quality of the organizations ND has providing services to people with disabilities. And one more lingering issue, not one provider has been given a dime of reimbursement for providing this support to our kids over these 11 weeks from March 16, 2020 through May 28, 2020. For providers in the state of ND, it is about the quality of services and being there

when we are needed, no matter the circumstances. We believe that efficiency is important but quality is essential. We need to be good stewards of the resources we have, but above all else, when needed, we need to be prepared to the best we can be, and deliver each and every time. But now that we have spent our hard won reserves to provide these services, our providers are less able to face the next crisis.

In November 2019, DHI opened a new Children's ICF-IDD in Grand Forks. This was a special project in collaboration with the DD Division, Life Skills and Training Center (LSTC) and DHI for the purpose of residential services for four children that were currently at LSTC. This ICF-IDD (5509) became fully operational on 2/24/2020 when the fourth of four boys moved in. This endeavor was certainly going to be challenging enough without COVID-19 but COVID-19 and school closings happened just three weeks later. Each of the four boys DHI was serving at 5509 had behavioral and mental health concerns. As was stated earlier, DHI has been around 46 years and has always served children. The difficulties we encountered and still encounter today are the lack of community resources to help support people, especially children, with higher behavioral needs when they present these difficulties. Sue Forester and the LSTC staff have been excellent to work with and been extremely supportive. The most significant issue with LSTC is logistics. Grafton is an hour away from Grand Forks. When behavioral issues arise, they can escalate very quickly, and any support LSTC can offer will not be timely enough to assist with resolving the event.

DHI has its' own "crisis team", made up of mostly administrative professionals with years of experience and all are Therapeutic Response trainers. DHI has this team so that we can respond with in-person support quickly during our most difficult behavioral events. Even with this timely support, sometimes events reach the intensity that mental health professionals are needed to assess the person having difficulty, for safety for themselves and others. When these calls are made, the first responders are the Grand Forks Police officers. Most times, the police officers arrive and just their presence will de-escalate the event, but not always. We have had events involving both children and adults we serve that have involved the need for physical, chemical, as well as mechanical(handcuffs) restraints with police officers and our staff intervening to try and keep everyone safe. In cases such as these, the paramedics arrive and we ask that the person be transported to the hospital for a psychiatric evaluation. The Grand Forks Police Department has been very professional, responsive and supportive during each of these intense events. The police are sometimes unsure of what their role is at times, as we are not looking for criminal charges against those struggling. Because of this, they can be frustrated with us and ask why did we call them. To be clear, when we make a call for emergency services, we are really looking for a safe transport to the hospital so that person struggling can be assessed.

Once at the hospital, it may take 30 minutes to several hours for psychiatric services to get involved and the assessment completed. Often there is lab work to insure medication levels are within therapeutic range. To be clear, the individuals having difficult have most times presented physical aggression toward others, including staff, others we support and even police officers. Property damage such as making holes in walls, throwing objects, slamming doors with enough force to dislodge the door or the door frame, and breaking windows are common during these intense events. The people are also most times, self-injurious and elopement risks as well. The hospital in Grand Forks has been very unwilling to admit people presenting these types of difficulties. In my conversations with the on-call psychiatrists assessing, especially when assessing children, they will not admit. I have been told that "We (the

hospital) cannot admit this person as we are not equipped to handle them as they are just too violent.” In an ironic twist, soon after they say that, they discharge the person and say that they are calm enough to return to their home. This is not just a DHI or Grand Forks issue. Providers across our state can tell you very similar stories about the frustration of taking on people with significant challenges, without adequate community support from others to assist the person in being successful in their community. As you are all well aware the behavioral and mental health support systems in ND, as well as in our country, are overwhelmed and under-staffed. There are more people in need of this type of support than there is support available. If providers are going to be successful with reducing the number of people at LSTC, we are going to need to be fully-funded to provide the support needed, creative with our approaches (like our own response teams), collaborative with LSTC and our home regions, and have adequate and responsive community support and services that will be of assistance when that assistance is needed most. The net result of not having the supports and resources needed, is a failed placement. When we are working to help those who pose the greatest need, efficient is important but quality is essential. Success means allowing people to thrive in an environment where we learn and grow every day. When people are able to maximize their full potential and live the life they dream of, that is definitely success!

I want to thank each of you for your time and attention today. It has been an honor and privilege to have this opportunity to share on behalf of Development Homes, Inc. as well as the many wonderful and dedicated providers in the great state of North Dakota.

Respectfully,

Scott Anderson, Program Services Director  
Development Homes, Inc.