

Testimony
House Bill 1012 – Funding DD Recreational & Social Centers
House Appropriations – Human Resources Division
Rep. Jon Nelson, Chairman
January 25, 2021

Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Division, for the record, my name is Tom Newberger. I am the Chief Executive Officer for Red River Human Services Foundation. We provide services to people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in Fargo, West Fargo and Wahpeton, North Dakota. I am here today to ask you to restore the \$150,000 that was removed from the Governor’s budget in the “Budget Account Code 712000” for the 2021-2023 budget. These funds are for Recreational and Social activities for people with IDD in Fargo and Grand Forks.

I will now explain why these funds are so critical and needed. First, our agency is a licensed and accredited provider for services. One of our programs is the Activity Center that has existed since 1972 and has 425 members. During this time period, the Activity Center has provided Recreational and Social services to people not only from our agency, but from the community and other IDD service providers. We provide services in the afternoons, evenings and on weekends so people with disabilities can live better lives. Examples of what our Activity Center offers for people with disabilities is hosting dances, playing pool, darts and air hockey, ceramics, safety training classes, such as how to stay safe while walking or riding bikes, providing food for those who cannot afford it, going to people’s homes or apartments if they are sick and buying them medications if they cannot afford it. We also support camping during the summer which they really enjoy. These are just a few examples of what we do to give people with disabilities better lives.

A question I received during the 2017-2019 legislative session from the Appropriations Committee was “Do other licensed residential providers do these services too?” This was a great question and really helped all the legislators at that hearing understand our critical services. My response to the question was yes, the residential providers do their best to give people in their programs options, but it is generally very difficult to do based on the limited number of FTEs they

have. For example, if everyone on this committee lived in the same group home and I am the only staff working with you in the late afternoon and evening, and one of you wants to stay home and watch television, another one of you wants to go out and get an ice cream cone, another one of you wants to go the park and another one of you wants to go bowling while someone else wants to play pool and the last one of you wants to do ceramics. The question is how can I as your only staff keep you all happy when everyone wants to do something different? The way to keep you all happy is to bring you to the Activity Center which our non-profit operates and our staff will meet your dreams and desires. The Activity Center promotes social connections and helps prevent mental health issues and reduces anxiety and possible physical aggression. So briefly, this is what our services do.

From a financial perspective, our annual budget for the Activity Center is \$221,000 and the State has supported our services with \$37,500 per year or seventeen percent (17%) of our budget. From an Activity Center member's perspective, the \$37,500 from the State equates to just below twenty-five cents per member per day. This is a very low cost. We previously implemented membership dues of \$8.00 per month and then reduced it to \$6.00 per month to make it more affordable. Most of the members could not afford it, so now have no membership dues.

I kindly and strongly recommend that this committee re-instate the funding for the two Recreational and Social Centers in our State and consider increasing it to fifty-cents per day per member or a total of \$300,000 per Biennium as a good portion of our other funding has been lost.

Thank you and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.