

HB 1012
Testimony of Brooke Austin
House Appropriations Committee
Human Resources Division
Hon. Jon Nelson, Chairman
January 25, 2021

Chairman Nelson and members of the Human Resources Division, I am Brooke Austin, CEO of Community Living Services, Inc., in Fargo, North Dakota.

Upon hearing that the funding for Section 11 is set to be eliminated, I wanted to make sure that you know about the people that would lose their services, and how detrimental to them it would be. People that receive services through Section 11 have developmental disabilities and need supports residentially and/or vocationally, but they do not qualify for federally funded services. In most cases, these are people that “fall through the cracks”, and the minimal services that they receive through Section 11 are a lifeline to health, safety, and community integration.

I work at Community Living Services in Fargo, and we provide Section 11 supports to 33 people. Typically, we provide approximately eight hours a month of supports to each person in Section 11, and the funding we receive for each person does not cover the cost of the services we provide. In other words, CLS, as a business, already loses money in order to support the people in the program. However, I’m not seeking additional funds for the program so that CLS and other providers can *break even*. I am advocating for preserving the funding needed to provide the minimal services to the people that would otherwise not receive any. These services are necessary, and the people that receive supports through Section 11 do not deserve to lose their access to these services.

Many of the people we support in Section 11 have been in the program for many years, and the services each person needs vary on their individual circumstances. For some, the services include assistance with medical appointment and health care supports. For others, it can be money management and budgeting supports. Sometimes it’s providing supports to accessing grocery stores and pharmacies. In some cases, they need supports to find and maintain employment. Additionally, supports have been needed to assist with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In all cases, Section 11 services improve the quality of life for the people receiving it.

One or two hours of support a week might seem insignificant or dispensable, but to people in the Section 11 program these are crucial. They can protect people with developmental disabilities from unemployment, homelessness, hospitalization, institutionalization, food insecurity, and discrimination.

Please restore the funding for the Section 11 program, so that North Dakota residents with developmental disabilities do not lose the supports that are currently in place.