

**Testimony**  
**House Bill 1012 (DHS Appropriation)**  
**House Appropriations- Human Resources Division**  
**Representative Nelson, Chairman**  
**January 25, 2021**

Chairman Nelson, Members of the House Appropriations Committee, I am Stacey Hunt, Licensed Clinical Psychologist in the state of North Dakota and Chief Executive Officer of St. Thomas Counseling Center, PLLC, in Jamestown. I am here today to provide information on House Bill 1012.

House Bill 1012 is a bill for an Act providing an appropriation for defraying the expenses of the Department of Human Services. This bill provides funds for the ND Behavioral Health Division's Substance Use Disorder Voucher program. I am here today in support of the SUD Voucher program.

St. Thomas Counseling Center, PLLC, is a mental health and addiction counseling center in Jamestown. We employ one Licensed Addiction Counselor and are licensed by the ND Department of Human Services Behavioral Health Division for Adult Level 2.1 (Intensive Outpatient Program) and Level 1 (Individual and Aftercare) treatment services. We accept commercial insurances and are approved providers for the Behavioral Health Division SUD Voucher program. Potential clients are generally referred to us from Parole and Probation, district court, local clinics, family/friends, or from South Central Human Service Center.

During the current biennium, St. Thomas Counseling Center has treated 101 clients who used the SUD Voucher to pay for services. These clients did not have private insurance and could not qualify for ND Medicaid or Sanford Expansion insurances. Without the SUD Voucher program to pay

for services, these clients would have had to go to the Human Service Centers to receive services; thus taking resources away from the chronic, core population the HSCs are intended to serve. Unfortunately, the appropriations for the SUD Voucher were exhausted as of June 30, 2020, and we had to start referring clients to SCHSC. These last six months have been difficult for not only our business, but also for potential clients who may have lost their jobs because of COVID related reasons. Many people are realizing that their use of substances during COVID quarantines is problematic and want to seek treatment. Because the SUD Voucher is exhausted, these ND citizens have to attempt to find treatment at the Human Service Centers, especially in a rural area like the Jamestown area because we do not have many treatment providers. Unlike my colleagues who have inpatient and residential treatment programs, we provide outpatient care in the client's community and often see clients who are not "deep end" users who have had multiple residential treatment episodes and continue to use or increase their use. We see clients who do not meet criteria to receive services at a HSC but have realized their use of drugs and alcohol have become detrimental to their life functioning. Completing Outpatient group or individual treatment is often enough support and help that they need to increase their functioning. Increased functioning for our STCC clients includes helping them find jobs, keep jobs, repair family relationships, become better parents and community members.

Additionally, the SUD Voucher provides transportation assistance. St. Thomas Counseling Center uses Voucher funds to ensure citizens who live in rural areas can access services. Approximately 60% of our Voucher clients live in Jamestown, leaving 40% who travel from other towns in South Central ND, including Valley City, Oakes, LaMoure, Napoleon,

Carrington, Cooperstown, and Edgeley. There are no substance use treatment providers in those areas, which means without the Voucher's transportation assistance, approximately 45 clients would not have been able to access services with us this biennium.

Funding for the SUD Voucher is included in the Behavioral Health Division budget appropriation. I feel that this program is a needed and valuable resource to the citizens of North Dakota and now advocate for the funding to not only be continued, but to be increased for the 2021-2023 biennium, so we can continue to provide a continuum of SUD treatment options among private and public providers and among outpatient and residential care.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this issue. This concludes my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Chairman Nelson and Members of the Committee