

Testimony
House Bill 1012
House Appropriations Human Resources Division
Rep. Jon Nelson, Chairman
January 26, 2021

Chairman Nelson, members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Division, I am Heather Simonich, Operations Director of Nexus-PATH. Nexus-PATH is a member of Nexus Family Healing, providing child welfare and behavioral health services in ND. I am here today to provide input on HB1012, specifically the Medical Services budget, relating to the equalization of Targeted Case Management (TCM) rates.

We understand the Department's effort to equalize Targeted Case Management rates within and across state plans. However, as a provider charged with supporting our schools and communities with much needed community-based services now more than ever – we have significant concerns regarding the established targeted case management rate.

Recently, Nexus-PATH creatively partnered with six North Dakota school districts to deliver intensive case management services to students and their families. This is a formal partnership with a signed MOU that places a Nexus-PATH school case manager within the school building. This individual works as a member of the school team serving students with the highest needs as identified by school staff. This partnership offers school professionals and students access to an intensive service not available through traditional school supports.

The Nexus-PATH case manager serves as a bridge between school, home, and the community. An individualized care plan based on a comprehensive assessment of student and family needs and strengths guides service delivery. The case manager routinely visits the family home, assists with transportation, connects the family to services available in the community, assists with student behavior at school, and works intensively with the student and family to build the skills necessary to overcome their challenges. Importantly, this service is provided throughout the summer and provides the family with access to a 24/7 on-call service staffed by a licensed social worker. Initial feedback from school professionals, students, and families has been overwhelmingly positive.

Currently, the cost of this service is funded by Medicaid Targeted Case Management or BCBSND billing, the school district, and various grants/donations. The cost of this service, particularly in our rural communities, is not sustainable without a significant contribution by the school district and sustained grant funding. As a provider, it is an ongoing challenge to rely heavily on unstable grant and school funding from one year to the next. The challenges in our rural areas related to the behavioral health workforce shortage and serving clients across expansive geography necessitates a targeted case management rate be established based on true service costs. The service referenced here is an excellent example of the type of service required to meet our most vulnerable families where they are at, build trust, and begin healing while at the same time supporting our educators and improving academic success.

I will close today just as I did yesterday – reminding us of Superintendent Baesler’s statement on Friday, “We cannot do this alone”. These words weigh heavy on me. I have provided you with an example of one innovative and successful private-public partnership to better meet the needs of our students and their families. North Dakota service providers can do this. It will take all of us, and your full support, but I believe we can answer the call. Our children’s lives depend on it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

The individuals below provided permission to list their name, email, and school district (agency) in support of this testimony and welcome questions you may have regarding their partnership with Nexus-PATH to deliver School Case Management service.

Missy Eidsness
Fargo Public School District
eidsnem@fargo.k12.nd.us

Michael Kaiser
Ellendale Public School District
michael.kaiser@ellendale.k12.nd.us

Tyler Hanson
Edgeley Public School District
Tyler.Hanson1@k12.nd.us

Luke Shaefer
Central Region Education Cooperative (CREA)
Luke.Schaefer@k12.nd.us

Dr. Mark Vollmer
Minot Public School District
mark.vollmer@minot.k12.nd.us

Dr. Rachael Agre
West Fargo Public School District
RAGRE@west-fargo.k12.nd.us

Andrew Jordan
Wilton Public School District
Andrew.Jordan@k12.nd.us