

Written Testimony on HB1012 relating to Substance Use Disorder Voucher 1-25-21

Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, for the record my name is Dave Marion and I have the great fortune of working for the Summit Prairie Recovery Center, located in rural Raleigh, North Dakota and west of the Missouri river. Summit Prairie Recovery Center is a one of kind, committed residential agency working with individuals seeking addiction and mental health services. It provides a short term, quiet, rural environment for recovery with committed staff and therapists experienced in substance use and mental health concerns.

We are in support of:

The re-instatement and full funding of the ND Substance Use Disorder Voucher Program to include acceptance of new providers and participants. The SUD Voucher Program has served as a safety net for those without health insurance or adequate resources to access addiction treatment in ND, however, funding ended in July for people seeking to enroll in the program. We receive around 10-15 calls daily from clients with Medicaid and Sanford expansion looking for intensive outpatient services and residential beds. Many of these individuals are referred to us by the physicians in the Emergency Rooms. Most of these individuals have experienced overdose and their lives are at extreme risk and are referred to us from other professionals that find lack of services for those most extreme needs. One client, who lived 60 miles from the nearest treatment professionals, reported he had no internet access due to rural location and lack of knowledge of technology and the inability to get himself sober enough to begin the learning process. How much more hostile can it get... his life was in jeopardy, no transportation or ability to obtain services, but denied by his insurance. He was alone and wanted help, unfortunately this happens so often for too many in ND. These are individuals that could be helped by the SUD Voucher system. The ND SUD Voucher is one the most important tools in serving the increasing need for North Dakotans who have a Substance use disorder. The voucher provides not only the ability of patients to obtain critical services in a timely manner, but it provides provider choice so patients can stay close to home and families. In addition, the voucher serves as a resource to keep patients out of emergency rooms, hospital beds, jails, and courts.

In recent conversations on the House side, the Dept. Of Humans services reps have used residential services as a negative thing. We have always been in support of a full continuum of care and the number of sick individuals that need this level of care and cannot access care is very large. Residential determinations are assessed by licensed clinicians and the critical need for residential care for the most critical individuals needing that level of help. My fear is that the inference of having too many residential beds will decrease even more access for individuals seeks this level of help. The amendments that came out of house human resources seem to add another layer of restrictions for all trying to seek help. It is disheartening that we would create more hurdles to get great quality services, at whatever level that is in the continuum of care. The SUD Voucher was established to address barriers to treatment and increase the ability of people to access treatment and services for substance use disorders. With one of the goals being to allow the individual to choose a provider with objectives to increase the number of providers and service options and those options communicated to individuals. Another Goal being able to improve access to quality services with objectives of SUD providers to provide evidence-based

services on an individual need, in addition to reduce financial barriers for individuals accessing needed services.

So, at the end of the day, it should always be, how we best serve individuals that need and want the help at whatever level that is. With these current amendments being considered, it does not seem that it is about serving people, rather more about restricting providers from accessing funds to help people. These amendments will be hurdles that add another layer, thus, not putting clients first.

With the ongoing pandemic that compounded, high alcoholism rates, Opioid Crisis and Meth resurgence we respectfully ask your support of reinstating the \$17-million-dollar request for the voucher. Though some may see a significant budget increase, those of us who serve patients that want better and committed to changing their path know that this will save lives!

Respectfully,

Dave Marion