

## Senate Human Services Committee-SB 2034

January 4, 2023

Madam Chair Lee and Members of the Senate Human Services Committee:

I am Joan Heckaman from Dickinson ND, and I am here at the request of Sen. Lee to provide some information for SB2034.

During the 2021-22 Interim, I served as Chair of the Children's Cabinet. The Cabinet was established in 2019 session to assess, guide, and coordinate the care for children across the state branches of government and tribal nations.

You can see the duties of the Cabinet as listed on page 2, lines 13-30. While these are all encompassing, the Cabinet provides a connection between the providers, families, and state agencies to look for gaps, current services available, and provide recommendations to improve services. The Cabinet brought forth several recommendations including support for a data base to provide necessary information for program development and funding, an all encompassing list of recommendations for foster care, recommendations to close gaps in mental and behavioral services for children, how to address overrepresentation of children in services from tribal country, addressing workforce/staffing needs, adjustments to the delivery of services for the court system, changes to the juvenile justice system including moving children in need of services to the zones, and a final discussion on modeling the Cabinet through information from the Aspen Institute.

Membership consists of 12 individuals-some specific to positions and others selected because of their connections with children's programming across the state. Here is the membership:

1. Governor/designee
2. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court/designee
3. Speaker of the House/designee
4. President Pro Tempore of the Senate/designee
5. Superintendent of Public Instruction/designee
6. Director of Protection and Advocacy/designee
7. Representation from tribal nations
8. Four individuals representing parents, private providers or community interests.

## 9. Chairman of the Cabinet (legislator) appointed by the Chairman of Legislative Management

As the Cabinet worked in monthly meetings, it became evident that there was no specific individual responsible for representing the Department of Health and Human Services which is the main connection for children's services. We also found that starting December 1, 2022, all legislators serving on the Cabinet would be leaving. The legislators represent 25% of the membership and they provide an important connection with the legislature concerning recommendations coming from the Cabinet.

There were also no reporting requirements for the Cabinet to provide any summary of their work. I did provide a report to the Interim Human Services Committee and also an in-person presentation to Governor Burgum.

Since the Cabinet has no authority to bring bills forward, the Human Services Committee willingly took this upon their authority and you have SB 2034 before you this afternoon for your consideration.

Senate bill 2034 does three things:

1. It changes the membership from the legislature to include 2 members from the House and 2 members from the Senate from opposite numbered districts to serve 2-year terms on the Cabinet. This will increase membership to 14 and also ensure continuity. (Page 1, lines 12-20).
2. It adds the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services or their designee as a member of the Cabinet (page 1, line 24). This then increases the membership to 15.
3. It provides for an annual report from the Cabinet to Legislative Management and the Governor regarding the activities and findings of the Cabinet (page 3, lines 1-2).

It has been my privilege to lead a great team of hardworking members who have worked diligently for the children of North Dakota. Going forward, Rep. Michelle Strinden has been appointed by the Chairman of Legislative Management to be the next Chair of the Cabinet.

Thank you for your time today. I would stand for any questions.

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