

Judicial Committee
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill #2202
1/17/23

Chairwoman and Members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Paula Condol. I am the Executive Director of the Dakota Children's Advocacy Center, with locations in Bismarck, Dickinson, McKenzie County, Standing Rock and in a few months, Jamestown. I am here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 2202.

The Dakota Children's Advocacy Center is one of the Children's Advocacy Centers across the state committed to improving the response to child abuse. Each CAC is a community partnership that utilizes a comprehensive multidisciplinary team approach in supporting alleged victims and investigations of child abuse. Professionals from social services, law enforcement, prosecution, victim advocacy and the medical and mental health communities meet under one roof so that a child only has to tell of his or her abuse one time. Sensitivity to the needs and abilities of children is the hallmark of the children's advocacy center model which is utilized at Children's Advocacy Centers all over the country.

Child abuse happens in North Dakota. In 2022 my centers alone saw nearly 582 children referred for abuse and provided over 15,000 services to them. This includes forensic interviews, advocacy services, mental health services and medical exams. Nearly 100 referrals were for physical abuse. Just to clarify, the Children's Advocacy Centers are typically only referred cases for severe physical abuse. These are cases where it is repeated ritualistic abuse, cases where there are lasting scars, bruising in areas that are difficult to bruise, broken bones and at time head trauma. These are not

referrals for in the heat of the moment poor choices or an argument gone wrong. Children's Advocacy Centers offer comprehensive services to help these children and families through this experience and start them on the road to healing. A part of this is providing medical exams to victims to ensure that their body is okay, to provide medical attention when it is not, and to preserve evidence of a crime. We do this through a collaboration with the Central Dakota Forensic Nurse Examiners, who provide these medical exams to these children at no charge to the family. However, less than a 1/3 of victims of physical abuse received an exam in 2022. Imagine that, having severe physical injury, yet not having access to medical care to know that you are okay. Senate Bill 2202 will provide a pilot project and funding to increase the exams of victims who are physically abused which will help start the child on the road to healing, enable referrals to further medical care when needed and preserve evidence that could keep this child safe in the future.

We all play a critical role in ensuring the safety of children and victims in our state. A large part of this is ensuring their bodies are okay and that they receive the medical attention needed to live a full and healthy life. You have an opportunity to make a big impact on the life of children today and I am here today to ask you for your support.

Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today and I will be happy to try and answer any of your questions.