

House Appropriations – Government Operations Division

Testimony on House Bill 1015

Representative Don Vigesaa – Chairman

January 13, 2021

Chairman Vigesaa and members of the House Appropriations – Government Operations Division, my name is Donna Byzewski and I am one of the guardianship directors at Catholic Charities North Dakota (CCND) and I am respectfully asking your committee to support an adjustment to Public Administrators Support Services (PASS) funding to \$2.5 million which would result in an increase in the funded caseload to 320 wards.

In February 2020, Catholic Charities North Dakota began providing guardianship services on behalf of individuals with mental health issues, vulnerable elderly persons and people with a traumatic brain injury. A guardianship program in Devils Lake made the decision to no longer provide guardianship services and Catholic Charities ND stepped up to fill this need. Thirty guardianship cases were transferred to Catholic Charities ND of which 25 were funded by the PASS program. Catholic Charities ND would not have been able to assume responsibility for these cases had it not been for PASS funding. Since inception, we have had 9 ward losses and 13 new admissions, bringing the number of guardianship cases served to 34 people. Services are provided by Shannon Henrickson, full time Director, and Crystal Keller, a full time Guardianship Worker, and they serve individuals who live in Fargo, Arthur, Jamestown, Devils Lake, Rugby, Lakota, Minot, Bottineau, Cando, Valley City, Carrington, Maddock, and Grand Forks.

Currently, our guardianship program receives PASS funding for 29 individuals. We also have 5 people who are on our waiting list for services. Many of our referrals have come from judges, Vulnerable Adult Protective Services, hospitals, Veterans Administration and families. To continue to meet the guardianship needs of indigent people in North Dakota, it is vital that funding for the PASS program be increased. It would be devastating to vulnerable people to languish on a waiting list because of limited funding. Often the circumstances in their life place them at risk of harm and they need the support of a guardian. Increased PASS funding is extremely important to ensure that our most vulnerable people do not fall through the cracks and go without needed services. Thank you for your time and consideration.