

Testimony in Support of SB 2002
Christina Sambor, Youthworks
House Appropriations
March 9, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Youthworks, the State's runaway and homeless youth serving program, I ask that you consider restoring full funding to critical programs that affect struggling youth, namely Diversion Programs, including the YCAP program, which serves Native American Youth.

This session, the legislature is looking at an overhaul of the juvenile justice system that focuses on service-based interventions. Diversion programs and YCAP are the very type of programs that the juvenile justice system seeks to emphasize and support. The programs have a proven track record of success and are very important resources in various communities.

Some data to support restoring full funding to these programs:

- The Diversion Program in Bismarck serves primarily youth that have been cited with various offenses due primarily to family discord—unruly, runaway, simple assault domestic, etc. Youth and families receive an assessment and connection to appropriate services to address the identified needs. When appropriate, services are coordinated with county human service zones or other providers to ensure the youth's needs are met. The goal of the program is to ensure that the underlying issues are addressed so that the youth and family can function well and avoid future need for law enforcement or Juvenile Court intervention.
- At Youthworks, the services available through the Diversion program include individual, group, and family counseling; referral for medical, psychiatric, or substance abuse needs; case management; mentoring; and inclusion in other opportunities at Youthworks—after school program, educational groups, etc. Families are also informed of Youthworks 24/7 crisis line and if needed, the Short Term Care and Assessment Center is available to families in crisis.
- The families served at Youthworks in the Diversion program receive amplified services as Youthworks leverages state funds by supplementing them with other funds and programming to meet these needs.
- In 2020, Youthworks received 85 referrals from the Juvenile Court (63 Diversion, 22 YCAP). Sixty youth were referred, as twenty five (25) youth were referred multiple times in the year.
- Youthworks' diversion program has historically had a 81% to 85% rate of NO new citations after cited juveniles are referred to the diversion program.
- 96% of youth in the Diversion program remained in their homes, rather than out of home placement.

- The YCAP program serves Native American Youth in much the same way that the Diversion program.

- The YCAP program served 33 youth in 2020, 22 of whom were court referrals and 11 were referrals from the community. These youth and their families have the opportunity to work with Native American staff, both professional and para-professional to prevent these youth from entering the juvenile justice system.

- Historically, the program has served 50 - 80 youth annually. The reduction in 2020 seems to be directly related to COVID.

- YCAP services include mentoring, after school programing, anger management, case management, mental health counseling, cultural programming, and leadership opportunities.

- In FY 2020-2021 Youthworks received \$90,000 from the court to fund the program. It is expected to be cut to \$0 for FY 2021-2022. In addition to the services provided by Youthworks, these funds are used to contract with Decoteau Trauma to provide behavioral health services at no cost to the families. The access is immediate as we are paying to have a therapist's time available for this service. This has helped reduce barriers to get help and also has provided great collaboration regarding service planning as YCAP staff and Decoteau Trauma meet weekly to staff cases.

YCAP has seen that:

- 80% of the youth referred for services in YCAP do not receive further juvenile citations

- 90% of the youth do not go to a formal court hearing

- 95% of youth remain in their home or with relatives, thus not requiring the state to take custody (Corrections (DJS) or Child Welfare)

Based upon the demonstrated efficacy of these programs, I respectfully request that full funding for these programs be restored to the Judicial Branch budget.