

Testimony on House Bill 1012  
House Appropriations Committee  
Human Resources Division  
January 25, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Nelson and members of the Committee. My name is Patti Senn and I am a Licensed Master Addiction Counselor in North Dakota. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1012, which provides for the full reinstatement and funding of the North Dakota Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Voucher Program.

As someone who has been licensed as an Addiction Counselor in North Dakota for 18 years, I know first hand the impact that a lack of financial resources has on individuals seeking treatment for their substance use disorder. Since its inception in 2015, the SUD Voucher Program has served as a safety net for those without insurance or without an ability to pay their ever-increasing out-of-pocket expenses for insurance co-pays and deductibles.

Furthermore, and what I believe is equally as important, the SUD Voucher Program allows individuals the freedom to choose which provider best meets their treatment needs. Prior to the Voucher, individuals would have little choice but to receive services at one of the Human Service Centers. In recent years, the HRC's have shifted priorities to providing services to what is identified as their core population, which generally speaking means treating those with an SMI (Serious Mental Illness) diagnosis or a co-occurring disorder. Someone with "just" a Substance Use Disorder diagnosis likely does not fall within their core population and will be referred to community providers. In addition, some HRC's do not provide any form of evening treatment, which is vital for most individuals who need to continue working during the day while receiving treatment in the evenings.

I urge your support of House Bill 1012 to provide for the full reinstatement and funding of the SUD Voucher Program, including opening the Program up to new providers and patients. Failure to reinstate this program will result in fewer people receiving the services necessary to address their SUD along with a corresponding increase in societal costs to include ER visits, hospitalizations, a diminished workforce, and incarcerations. Given the continued and escalating opioid epidemic, the resurgence of methamphetamine use, the ever-present alcohol abuse in our communities, and the devastating and long-lasting impact of the current COVID 19 pandemic, it would be short-sighted to underfund this program at a time when more people than ever are in need of BH services. Support of this legislation will provide a lifeline for many North Dakotans to receive the necessary treatment through a provider of their choice. Thank You.

Respectfully,

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