

HB 1012

TESTIMONY of the ND Behavioral Health Planning Council

January 25, 2021

Chairman Nelson and members of the committee, I am Brenda Bergsrud, Chair of the Behavioral Health Planning Council. The Council is a federally mandated state-level advisory body responsible for providing counsel to the ND Department of Human Services regarding the provision of behavioral health services to the citizens of North Dakota. The Council is made up of 30 diverse members including consumers, family members and other stakeholders. I wish to provide testimony on behalf of the Council regarding certain core issues.

Secure Responsible State Funding Levels. As a council we request that the Committee sufficiently fund the state's behavioral health programming efforts to protect long-fought-for gains across critical service areas. Mindful of the state's current financial standing and human needs, the Council encourages the Committee to minimally sustain current funding levels across the state's vital programs, where the needs are clearly evidenced.

Continue and Protect Programs. Programs in place need to continue. We also welcome the inclusion of Medicaid 1915(i) programming as a long-sought supplement to crucial care for individuals eligible within Medicaid. Yet, we must resist any short-term satisfaction with adding federal programs and funding at the expense of reducing or weakening state funded programs that are accessible to all state citizens. The welfare of our state's citizens is too important to reduce state-level funding for core services.

Continue Medicaid Expansion and Remove Its Sunset Clause. The council supports the continuation of the state's Medicaid Expansion program. The council further recommends that the Committee remove the program's current sunset clause. What the state's citizens deserve is a Medicaid Expansion program that is secure and dependable.

Balance Behavioral Health Program Funding. The council requests that the Committee secure a proper balance between substance use and mental health programming and funding, establishing a programmatic and budgetary equity that supports both areas and prevents any redistribution of funds that might introduce disparity. The state must commit to structure and fund both mental health and substance use programs that address the complex, real, and overlapping needs within each domain.

Optimize the State's Behavioral Health Strategic Efforts. The council recognizes the need to optimize both state and federal funding to support our state's behavioral health system. Securing federal and state funds in a manner that offers the best benefit to the most people is demanding work. The council is mindful of this work and dedicates itself to counseling the Department of Human Services regarding this work. We trust you will consider our counsel in

this regard. The state's behavioral health community, including all its stakeholders, have collaborated across a number of years to develop the state's current behavioral health strategic plan. This plan articulates what a balanced statewide behavioral health system should look like. What this plan identifies captures some of the best thinking of where we as a state need to invest our time, money, and effort. The Council encourages the Committee to build a budget that supports the implementation of this plan, including optimizing our federal and state funding. As you move forward with your discussions in building a responsible budget, we ask that you minimally sustain the contribution of state funds to support the state's behavioral health strategic plan, which lays forth a responsible, measured means of meeting the behavioral health needs of our citizens, now and into the future.

The council appreciates this opportunity to present these comments regarding HB 1012. The council also extends an offer to provide any assistance and additional information that might aid the Committee in its deliberations.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our comments.