

Testimony on HB 1012
Medical Services
2021 Legislative Session
January 26, 2021

Representative Chairman Nelson, Representative Vice-Chairman Kreidt and Members of the House Human Services Appropriations Committee:

My name is Vicki Peterson, and I am a Family Consultant for Family Voices of ND and I am a parent of a young adult with Autism with ID and chronic health conditions, a former member of the Governors Autism Task Force.

I am testifying in front of you to look at the Autism Services in ND. In SB 2089 there is a consideration on the table to eliminate the ND Autism Voucher which is all state funded. This program serves as a gap for those persons with autism. This child would be unable to access the Autism Waiver under Medical Services as they do not screen ICF, or the waitlist is too long and need services today, not a year from today, or the child does not fit into the tight age range criteria. Throughout the session everyone will be hearing on Juvenile Justice Reform and Keeping children and youth out of institutions and having a wider scope of home and community-based services. Every session since 2009, you as a legislative body have stated the need for persons with autism. The two mentioned programs would do exactly that if properly accessed and utilized for what the services that they should provide. Every two years there is the age gap filled to keep those children that currently utilize the autism waiver, do not fall off. While every year there is a continuous waitlist to access the autism waiver every year with dollars not being spent. (I have attached the Dashboard from the Department of Human Services.) The same goes for the Autism Voucher, no waitlist but utilization exceptionally low as parents have no way of deciding what they can access without some guidance. Respite is one service that is utilized heavily for this program, possible sensory items are another item that could be purchased from the program. Transportation is listed in the Autism Voucher Brochure but so many denials happen as it does not benefit the person with autism, the rule currently we are being told is to give support to the caregiver. I can agree with that but allowing transportation to happen for the child or youth to access an informal setting for a social activity, lessons for swimming, or other is being denied which is extremely difficult for parents to comprehend as it helps them as a caregiver but also supports that child with autism, which a core deficit is social communication. Autism Services

has truly felt like they do not have a home; the need for expertise in autism to understand what the child needs to have a productive and quality of life. Autism is a Spectrum Disorder that spans the lifespan, it is a spectrum, no two alike. This is what justified the two programs. I am asking to open more slots for the Autism Waiver and to re-look at the meanings of in-home support and respite in the Department of Human Services that could provide that type of support which families need. I would also like to see the Autism Services possibly move to Behavioral Health. These services need a better suited home. I am also going to ask you to consider that the ND Autism Voucher is a much-needed program and asking everyone not to eliminate.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Vicki L Peterson

Family Voices of ND

vickiasdc@bis.midco.net

701-258-2237

701-527-2889