



2021 SB 2205
House Human Services Committee
Representative Robin Weisz, Chairman
March 10, 2021

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Melissa Hauer, General Counsel for the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I testify in support of Senate Bill 2205 and ask that you give this bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

The bill would require the Department of Human Services to cover costs related to medical interpreters needed for Medicaid beneficiaries who have a hearing loss or clients who have limited English proficiency. Reimbursement of interpreter services is fundamental to quality medical care and is essential for the health and wellbeing for the patients that do not speak English or who have hearing impairments. The use of such interpreters can improve patients' quality of care, enhance understanding of and adherence to medical treatments, and ultimately, decrease health care costs by reducing adverse health care outcomes.

Interpretation services are currently a covered service for the Medicaid Expansion program, but North Dakota has chosen not to reimburse for this service in the traditional Medicaid program. In many cases, it ends up costing the provider out of pocket to see a Medicaid patient that requires interpretation services. The reimbursement for the medical services is below the cost charged by the interpreter. This is especially unfortunate given that federal matching funds are available for states' expenditures related to the provision of oral and written translation administrative activities and services provided for Medicaid recipients. The current ND federal matching rate is approximately 52%. In other words, the federal government would provide over half of the cost of language services needed by Medicaid beneficiaries.

Currently, fourteen states and the District of Columbia directly reimburse Medicaid providers for language services. Allowing North Dakota Medicaid approved providers to be reimbursed for this service would expand access to care and improve communication which leads to better care.

We ask that you give this bill a Do Pass recommendation. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Hauer, General Counsel/VP
North Dakota Hospital Association