

Senate Appropriations Committee
House Bill 1012
March 9, 2021
Senator Holmberg, Chair

Chairman Holmberg and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. I am Denise Harvey, Director of Program Services with the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A). P&A is an independent state agency that protects people with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and advocates for the civil and legal rights of people with disabilities.

P&A supports the building of a new State Hospital with reduced beds, in conjunction with the establishment of 6 to 10 beds in the western part of the state. While this is not the first request for the building of a new State Hospital, it is time. The institutionalized setting provided through the large older buildings is not conducive to modern treatment and requires additional staffing due to its size. A new facility would be much more efficient, both in cost and serving individuals. Funds that would be spent for costly renovations would be better spent providing services in the western part of the state. There is a tremendous need for beds in the western part of the state, to both serve individuals who require more intensive services and to prevent family members from being separated in times of need. It is expected for persons with medical needs to receive services near their homes, and it is also expected for persons with mental illness to receive services near their homes.

P&A supports the 1915(i) state plan amendment, and the tremendous efforts made to put this into place. P&A appreciates the extensive work done by DHS to expand behavioral health services to meet the needs of people with the right service, at the right time, nearest their home. While there are many positive steps taking place, there are questions about the number of agencies that are ready to provide services through the 1915(i) at this time, and proposed budget reductions related to this. P&A expresses concern about reductions in funding for family support programs to include Family Voices and the Federation of Families. It is our understanding that these programs are marked for significant cuts for the next biennium. The support provided for families through these programs is invaluable. P&A expresses concern about the elimination of the Experienced Parent Program for early intervention. In addition, the large reduction proposed for the Voluntary Treatment Program is concerning. Prior to the establishment of this program, parents were put in situations where they were required to relinquish custody of their child to access needed mental health services, including the use of residential treatment facilities. Reductions in funding for these programs would be very detrimental to families with the highest level of needs.

P&A supports peer support, along with certification and professional supervision for this program. We look forward to hearing of the positive results from consumers using this program. This has been a top priority for the consumers of mental health services for years, and we are very grateful for the support provided for this program and encourage on-going full financial support for this program.

P&A supports full funding for the North Dakota Brain Injury Network. The proposed significant cut in this program, which already has a limited staff of 3 persons, would drastically reduce services provided across the state of North Dakota. Services provided through the North Dakota Brain Injury Network that involve outreach, education and collaboration are not individual specific services and would not be reimbursable through the 1915(i). While the efforts to increase services for individuals with brain injury through the 1915(i) are greatly appreciated, there remains much work to be done beyond this. The knowledge base and services provided by the North Dakota Brain Injury Network are essential for individuals with brain injuries and family members throughout our state. In addition, P&A supports full funding for the facilitation of the ND Brain Injury Advisory Council by the Consensus Council. The work of the Advisory Council is vast and complex. The particularly skilled facilitation provided for meetings with members across the state, along with sub-committees, has been important in assisting the Council to meet targeted goals to best serve individuals with brain injuries and family members.

I am glad to answer any questions.

Denise Harvey, Director of Program Services
Protection & Advocacy
701-328-2950