

Testimony Prepared for the
House Human Services Committee

February 16, 2021

By: Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

RE: House Bill 1091 – Related to Shelter Care Services and Foster Care

Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Service Committee, my name is Kim Jacobson. I serve as the Director of Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone which includes the service area of Traill and Steele Counties. In addition, I am a current member of the North Dakota County Director's Association. Please consider my testimony in support of House Bill 1091.

Human service zones are responsible for the care, custody, and placement of children in the North Dakota foster care system. There are 19 children currently ordered by the Juvenile Court to be in my legal custody, care, and control as a human service zone director. Part of the responsibility and duty as legal custodian is to ensure proper placement of children in which we are responsible. At times, we are faced with emergency situations, a lack of available placements, and/or faced with the need to take a step back and closely evaluate specialized needs of a child as unique or challenging factors are presented. Yet other times, a temporarily placement is needed so that protective measures can be implemented, and a foster care placement can be diverted. HB 1091, if enacted, would support human service zones with this important responsibility of child placement.

Currently, there are three licensed shelter care/assessment programs in North Dakota. These facilities are important to supporting the foster care system. However, due to technical challenges this type of placement has not been eligible for approved funding. Rather, custodial agencies have historically needed to use other funds, often local funds, to pay for this

foster care related cost. SB 1091 would provide for a certification process for shelter care programs which will allow the use of nonfederal funds for this important service. This closes this funding gap and helps meet a long-term need. In addition, HB 1091 provides important accountability while requiring that shelter care programs to be subject to set standards.

This bill was improved upon while in the House. The improvements made are on Page 4, Lines 17-21. The use of nonfederal funds for this purpose was clarified. Historically, there was a conflict between the term public funds vs. nonfederal funds as it relates to shelter care. HB 1091 now contains language that provides clarity and provides important flexibility. In addition, this section now provides the flexibility for DHS to issue an extension, beyond seven days, if there is legitimate need. Both of these areas of clarification were at the request of Human Service Zone Directors and are included in the bill before you today.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1091. I stand available to the committee for questions.