

Testimony for Senate Bill 2086

Senate Human Services Committee

January 6, 2021

Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Steven Reiser, Director of Dakota Central Human Service Zone. I am also a member of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Association. Please accept this testimony in favor of SB 2086.

When SB 2124 passed the last legislative session, what was county social services where in for big changes. Human service zones were formed in January of 2020 and have been operating for one year. Human service zone directors started their duties in April. I think everyone knew that changes this big were going to take some time and that review of the statute would be necessary. SB 2086 is the start of that review process. While much of the bill is cleaning up parts of the law that were discovered that could use improvement there are two parts of this bill I would like to address.

I agree with the repeal chapter 50-11.2 relating to foster care parent grievance. Please note that foster parents still have a grievance process that is in place in all human service zones. This process is being reviewed so that it will become more uniform across all zones. What is currently in statute is this extra process that only foster parents have. Biological parents and relative placement "parents" do not have this process to challenge a case management decision made by a zone. By removing this it will allow all parties to have the same grievance process.

The second area I would like to address is in Amendment Section 15 number 4 which is on page 17 and starts on line 1. This section deals with forming a process for zone employees to transfer to state employment. I believe rather than jumping to forming a process to accomplish this there should be more study put into what kind of consequences are going to occur when this transfer is complete. I

have heard two main reasons why zones would contemplate pursuing this option. One is that there is a feeling that local control is lost. I agree that local control is changing but I believe that local boards and agencies that are closer to the clients can make better decisions about how services are provided in their neighborhoods. What I believe is needed is some study and defining what the roles will be of local board members, commissioners, and zone directors. This would allow for a more cooperative teamwork approach in doing the work of human services. The second reason I hear is that because of the inequity in salary and benefits that some feel that they would be better off as state employees rather than zone employees. I believe addressing these issues head on rather than making a transfer without knowing what the consequences are will be a better solution. Once a transfer is made, I believe that it will be difficult to ever go back. That is why all the factors regarding transfers should be studied.

Another part of this section that I believe could use improvement is that there is no mention of zone boards in the process. Zone boards should and could have a lot of good ideas regarding the issues I have brought up.

Thank you for accepting my testimony and I would try to answer any questions you may have.