

Testimony in Support of HB 1014

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North Dakota House Appropriations Committee – Government Ops Division

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Chairman Monson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Christina Sambor, I am here today on behalf of the North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People. I come before you today to provide information on the impact that homelessness has on the Citizens and communities of North Dakota, and to help illustrate why the state's appropriation to the North Dakota Homeless Grant is so critical to the work to prevent and end homelessness in North Dakota. We come before you today to support the critical nature of these funds, and to ask you to commit to fund the NDHG at \$5M this biennium and to transfer the program to the NDHFA.

The North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG) has provided vital funds for service providers across our state addressing the issue of homelessness. These dedicated service providers are not just meeting the immediate needs of those in an emergency housing crisis, they are working to prevent and end long-term homelessness. Shelters remain at capacity and funds that prevent people from falling into homelessness regularly run short. Regularly, over half of those seeking prevention assistance are routinely turned away due to lack of funds.

Based on the annual point in time count required by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Wilder Survey of Homelessness, and ongoing emergency shelter data, it is estimated that upwards of 1,000 people experience homelessness on any given night in the Fargo-West Fargo metro area. This number includes those who are sheltered, unsheltered, and who are homeless but "doubled up" with friends, family, or acquaintances. In many cases emergency shelter is the only thing keeping individuals and families from freezing to death during our cold winters.

Increasing NDHG funding is imperative for addressing homelessness in our state. Services across the state are underfunded and in some, particularly rural areas, there is a near to complete absence of services. Most services are in our urban centers, chiefly in the eastern part of the state. Due to the lack of services across the state is common for the most affordable thing for a community to do is provide transportation for people experiencing homelessness to one of these urban centers where shelters are already full, and resources stretched.

The unmet need of homeless programs can be demonstrated by past requests of NDHG funding. The table below shows that historically, the funding needs have remained twice the amount available.

	Applications for NDHG	Funded
2013	\$2,447,038	\$1,250,000
2014	\$2,428,268	\$750,000
2015	\$2,148,174	\$750,000
2016	\$2,187,524	\$750,000
2017	\$409,500	\$150,000
2018	\$280,500	\$150,000

Maintaining and increasing homeless response systems such as shelter and prevention services and increasing affordable housing and supports for vulnerable populations is the only way to move beyond “band-aids” on the issue of homelessness and moving to actually reducing and ending long-term homelessness. NDHG is key to this larger picture of ending long-term homelessness—making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time for individuals and families in our state.

NDHG does not just meet emergency needs in shelter but provides vital prevention dollars. Preventing homelessness is more cost effective than providing shelter and takes less of a toll on families. These prevention dollars are crucial to the work of reducing and ending long-term homelessness.

Funding homeless services and providing prevention dollars is the smart way to do the right thing. Homelessness costs our communities a lot of money. People experiencing homelessness often make up less than 10% of the population but consume 50-60% of resources. HUD estimates that a person experiencing chronic homelessness can cost a community \$30,000-50,000 a year. Properly funded housing solutions can drop those costs by half or more. The Housing Navigation program at Fargo’s Presentation Partners in Housing demonstrated that when people who have experienced chronic homelessness are housed with proper supports, not only do they find the human dignity that comes with having a place to call home, there is a cost savings to the community at large. This program utilizes the Housing First model and has tracked the use of services of 20 participants before and after stable housing. In one year this program demonstrated nearly \$320,000 of savings to Fargo/Moorhead. Admissions to detox services dropped by 92%. Ambulance rides were lowered by 88%, a savings of over \$130,000 alone. Emergency room use dropped by 71%, a savings of over \$136,000. And nights in emergency shelter were reduced by 99%. This is one small program investing in the lives of people and having a profound impact on those

individuals and on wider medical and shelter costs savings. Imagine the impact that could be made with increased NDHG dollars across the state.

At a time when issues of addiction, recovery, and behavioral health are on the rise, it is important to remember that stable housing is key to addressing all these other concerns. When sleeping in a car, on the street, or even in emergency shelter, one cannot address health concerns, addiction, or mental health issues. If we do not provide adequate homeless services in our state, investment in addressing these other important issues is lost for a population desperately in need of help.

In closing, I want to acknowledge that NDHG funds don't just impact direct services and individual lives. These funds are also needed for proper data collection and reporting. Data is a key component in preventing and ending long-term homelessness. Without good data we cannot address gaps in services or ensure that we are funding programs that have the best outcomes and are making the greatest impact. NDHG can ensure that service providers are properly resourced so agency data quality does not suffer. NDHG can also aid in ensuring that the perpetually underfunded, federally mandated Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data base is properly functioning for state and federal reporting.

While the causes of homelessness can range from trauma such as job loss, domestic violence, and addiction issues, to disabilities and health challenges, the only solution to homelessness is housing. NDHG provides critical funds that not only help those in crisis find shelter but ultimately connects people to find or remain in housing. Therefore, NDHG is not simply aid or programs, it is part of the solution to ending long-term homelessness in North Dakota.