

Testimony Prepared for the  
**House Appropriations – Human Resource Sub-Committee**  
March 9, 2023  
By: Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

**RE: Senate Bill 2012 – Children and Family Services Budget**

Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Sub-Committee, my name is Kim Jacobson. I am the Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director, which includes the service area of Traill and Steele Counties. In addition, I serve as President of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. Please consider my testimony in support of SB 2012 – Children and Family Services (CFS) Budget.

Human service zones provide a wide array of safety net services to children and families across North Dakota. This includes core services to local communities while targeting local needs. As human service zones we operate a child welfare system that touches a full service spectrum ranging from education/prevention to protective and legal custody of foster children. In North Dakota, Human Service Zone Directors serve as the legal custodian of foster children.

The CFS budget is key to supporting the operations and services of human service zones and the vulnerable children and families we serve. Key examples of items covered in this budget include payments to foster payments for youth placed in their home, critical service contracts such as the forensic interview program provided by Children’s Advocacy Centers, subsidized adoption payments to help meet the needs of special needs adoptive children. This budget touches our most vulnerable children and their families.

Today, I ask for your support of this budget. I realize that this \$180.8 million dollar budget is a sizable request. However, in North Dakota we have a shortage of services to children and

their families. We need to maintain and even expand upon the supports needed to have strong healthy children and families.

As human service zones, there are several key items that I would urge your support. First, I would request reinstatement of the (4) FTES from the Executive Budget for a Child Protective Services (CPS) Safety Team. This team would be a deployable unit that would assist human service zones with time and safety sensitive assessments of suspected child abuse/neglect. This team would assist zones during peak activity and during times of employee turnover. In 2022, North Dakota Human Service Zones experienced a 37.49% turnover rate in child welfare workers. This means 128 of 341 employees departed from their position in one year. There are many reasons for the turnover. However, with turnover there is a loss of productivity during the recruitment and training process. Newer team members are not able to produce the work of more veteran workers. In the world of child welfare, this means there may be a slower response to child safety issues and the overall expertise level of the workforce is in flux. This specialty team, which could be state or human service zone team members, would help carry the load, allow time for training workforce, and would help stabilize caseloads. While I urge your reinstatement of this item, I also ask for flexibility for the Department and Human Service Zones to strategize if this specialty team would best be provided at the zone or state level.

Furthermore, I urge your support of the (7) FTES for Enhanced Case Management. This also would be a specialty team that would assist statewide. This team would help provide additional case management support for our most complex needs foster youth who are at escalated risk of displacement, high level of treatment/care, and with complex physical/behavioral health needs. Similarly, I request flexibility for discussion between the Department and Human Service Zones to determine if this specialty team would be best provided at the zone or state level.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony. I stand for questions from the committee.