

## House Appropriations – Human Resources Division

Representative Nelson, Chairman

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### Responding to the Children’s Behavioral Health Crisis: Request for Increased Reimbursement for Tier 2 & Tier 3 Mental Health Professionals

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Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Committee – Human Resources Division. My name is Luke Klefstad, Division Director, The Village Family Service Center. SB 2012 passed the Senate with an increase in Medicaid reimbursement to 100% of the professional rate for Tier 2 behavioral health professionals (Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists). Currently Tier 2 and Tier 3 professionals only receive 75% of the full rate.

An increase in these rates will drastically improve three key areas critical in providing services to some of our most vulnerable children. First, it will improve **accessibility**. Currently, wait times for services are at an all-time high. An increase in reimbursement rates will help all providers including those in private practice and community mental health agencies by giving them an opportunity for financial sustainability and likely change business practices through expansion of services. Secondly, it will help increase the **quality** of services. Many private practices limit or don’t accept ND Medicaid clients due to poor reimbursement rates. Increasing rates could increase the number of skilled professionals exponentially. Lastly, an increase to the Medicaid reimbursement will help address the **workforce** shortage by allowing agencies to offer more competitive salaries and to increase the number of professionals in private practice who are currently not taking ND Medicaid clients.

I am writing in support of SB 2012. However, as it was passed in the Senate, the increase in reimbursement would not take effect until July 1, 2024. I am asking this committee to please consider the increase in funding to start July 1, 2023. The need for a more comprehensive continuum of outpatient services for children is at an all-time high. We are at a critical time for improved children’s behavioral health, and they deserve timely and accessible services. Waiting until the second year of the biennium will mean a critical delay in medically necessary services to many children and families. The longer we wait the more they suffer.

## **NORTH DAKOTA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL TIERS (NDCC 25-01-01)**

The tiered system for behavioral health professionals in North Dakota was established in 2017 by the 65<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly and is found in Chapter 25-01 -01 of the ND Century Code. The intent of the tiered system was to establish a basic ranking of behavioral health professionals (both licensed and unlicensed) based on education and scope of practice.

### **Tier 1 mental health professional**

A **tier 1a** mental health professional is

- psychiatrist licensed under chapter 43-17 (PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS)
- psychologist licensed under chapter 43-32 (PSYCHOLOGISTS)

A **tier 1b** mental health professional is

- licensed physician or a physician assistant licensed under chapter 43-17 (PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS)
- advanced practice registered nurse licensed under chapter 43-12 (NURSE PRACTICES ACT)

### **Tier 2 mental health professional**

A **tier 2a** mental health professional is an independent clinician who is

- licensed independent clinical social worker licensed under chapter 43-41 (SOCIAL WORKERS)
- licensed professional clinical counselor licensed under chapter 43-47 (COUNSELORS)
- licensed marriage and family therapist licensed under chapter 43-53 (MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY PRACTICE)

A **tier 2b** mental health professional is

- addiction counselor licensed under chapter 43-45 (ADDICTION COUNSELORS)
- registered nurse licensed under chapter 43-12 (NURSE PRACTICES ACT)

### **Tier 3 mental health professional**

- licensed associate professional counselor licensed under chapter 43-47 (COUNSELORS)
- licensed certified social worker licensed under chapter 43-41 (SOCIAL WORKERS)
- licensed professional counselor licensed under chapter 43-47 (COUNSELORS)
- associate marriage and family therapist licensed under chapter 43-53 (MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY PRACTICE)
- occupational therapist licensed under chapter 43-40 (OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS)
- licensed practical nurse licensed under chapter 43-12 (NURSE PRACTICES ACT)
- behavior analyst licensed or registered under chapter 43-32 (PSYCHOLOGISTS)
- vocational rehabilitation counselor practicing under chapter 50-06.1 (VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION)
- school psychologist
- human relations counselor

### **Tier 4 mental health professional**

- direct care associate or technician