

House Appropriations – Human Resources Division

Representative Jon Nelson, Chairman

March 16th, 2023

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

Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Committee – Human Resources Division. My name is Jim Vetter, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch. I am testifying to offer my strongest support of the increase of North Dakota Medicaid reimbursement rates for Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral health providers. The need for a more comprehensive continuum of outpatient services for children is at an all-time high. 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. Waitlists for services continue to be very long and higher reimbursement rates will help private practice and community mental health agencies big and small maintain financial viability and increase the likelihood of expanding services. Secondly, it will help increase the quality of services. Many providers in private practice limit their North Dakota Medicaid caseload due to low reimbursement rates which leaves many non-profit community mental health agencies to take on the responsibility of serving those clients. Lastly, an increase to the Medicaid reimbursement will help address the workforce shortage by allowing agencies to offer more competitive salaries.

I am also testifying in support of SB 2012 which includes this appropriation. 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. Increased reimbursement would help us maintain our current Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral health providers through competitive salaries and it supports recruiting providers to address our communities’ increasing needs. There is a critical need for improved children’s behavioral health services. This change will bring children the timely, accessible services they require.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. Please feel free to contact me directly at 701.221.5330.