

North Dakota House Human Services Committee
SB 2155
March 15, 2023

Chair Weisz, Vice Chair Ruby and House Human Services Committee Members, my name is Mara Jiran and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Spectra Health, a federally qualified health center (FQHC) with clinics located in Grand Forks and Larimore, North Dakota. I thank you for your time and for the opportunity to provide testimony to encourage you to vote yes for SB 2155.

Spectra Health has been a critical resource in rural and urban northeast North Dakota for twenty years. Much like our partner health centers, we provide comprehensive primary care services, that include medical, dental, behavioral health, case management, optometry, chiropractic, and addiction services. We have significantly invested in integrating behavioral health services into all aspects of primary care through an evidenced-based model that focuses on brief behavioral health interventions. Essentially what this means is that Spectra Health has onsite behavioral health professionals that are available for immediate support, as opposed to a behavioral health visit that is scheduled in 2-3 weeks. We have seen great success in this integrated behavioral health model – resulting in improved patient satisfaction and wellbeing along with improved coordination of care with other health systems, including the human service center in our region.

Furthermore, through partnership with local public health, Spectra Health has significantly expanded access to much needed substance use disorder services. Recognizing the gaps in care within our region, the partnership with local public health has helped to develop and grow crucial services. We now have two onsite licensed addiction counselors, and our team of primary care providers are able to prescribe medications for both opioid and alcohol use disorders. Embedding these services within an integrated primary care setting reduces the stigma of receiving care for addiction services and has dramatically improved the lives of those struggling with addiction in urban and rural North Dakota.

While Spectra Health serves individuals and families with or without insurance, we recognize that some of our neighbors need extra support. In 2016 we hired our first social worker to provide case management services. Since that time, we have grown to seven (7) full time case managers and support a minimum of one social work intern. This investment is a critical resource to address various social determinants of health that include, but are not limited to, food and housing insecurity, transportation assistance, assistance applying for insurances, etc. At the height of the COVID pandemic, Spectra Health saw a 300% increase in case management visits. The need for case management services has not waned and has, in fact, grown as more and more North Dakotans try to make ends meet with rising costs.

This is both an exciting and challenging time in health care. Health centers across the state are uniquely responding to the needs of each of our communities. We are investing to ensure access to behavioral health and recovery services are available in our rural and urban communities from the Badlands to the Red River Valley. Your support of SB 2155 is an investment in these critical services via a primary care delivery system that is both cost effective and easily accessible to all North Dakotans.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony and I welcome any questions.

Respectfully,

Mara Jiran, CEO
Spectra Health