

House Human Services Committee
Testimony In Support of Senate Bill #2187
3-6-23

Chairman and Members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Paula Condol. I am the Director of the Dakota Children's Advocacy Center, here in Bismarck, Dickinson, McKenzie County, Jamestown and Standing Rock. I am also a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor and Supervisor. I am here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 2187.

The Dakota Children's Advocacy Center is one of the Children's Advocacy Centers across the state committed to improving the response to child abuse. Each CAC is a community partnership that utilizes a comprehensive multidisciplinary team approach in supporting alleged victims and investigations of child abuse. We provide many services to child victims and their family members using evidenced based practices, all free of charge to the families. Sensitivity to the needs and abilities of children is the hallmark of the children's advocacy center model which is utilized at Children's Advocacy Centers all over the country. In 2022 my center provided services to over 900 individuals, including mental health services to the victims, parents, and siblings. Over half of these counseling services were provided over telehealth to rural and underserved regions across the state.

The Counseling Compact will have many benefits, that I am sure that you have heard today. It will allow for counselor mobility (which can help us retain employs), it increases access to care for clients, and can ensure continuity of care for the client who moves or relocates. However, I think it is important to note that the Counseling Compact will also greatly benefit and improve the mental health needs of children in our state. Many of the children that we work with come from split homes and it is very common that one parent lives in one state and the other parent lives in another.

Currently as our licensure stipulates, we are only able to provide services in the state that we are licensed. What that means for kids who are shuffled back and forth between two households is a disruption of services, which often translates to increased stress, difficulty sleeping, eating, and behavior problems. Unfortunately, it is a very common occurrence, every May several of our clients, in the middle of working through their horrific trauma, are forced to just stop services with someone they have built a rapport and trust with. Most of these kids are unable to “pick up services” in the other state due to long waitlists and they spend the summer struggling with lack of support. Almost always, when they return services need to start over as trust was lost and skills have waned. We also have many families that move in the middle of services due to jobs, schooling and sometimes just wanting to get away from the place where the abuse happened. Being able to provide continuity of services for these children and families would have an enormous impact on both them and their families.

I am also supportive of the amendment to the bill that would allow Psychologists to provide supervision to counselors. According to the North Dakota Board of Counselor Examiners there are only 63 certified supervisors available the state, this includes several supervisors with limited availability, and those like myself who only have the time to supervise those at their place of work. In the couple of weeks alone I had two counselors reach out looking for a supervisor, both of whom sounded exhausted in the their search for someone who could help. Finding supervision is difficult and in a state that is in dire need of mental health professionals, it only makes sense to broaden the scope of supervision.

Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today, I appreciate your support and I am happy to try and answer any of your questions.