



*Representing the Diocese of Fargo  
and the Diocese of Bismarck*

103 South Third Street  
Suite 10  
Bismarck ND 58501  
701-223-2519  
ndcatholic.org  
ndcatholic@ndcatholic.org

**To:** House Human Services Committee  
**From:** Christopher Dodson, Executive Director  
**Subject:** Senate Bill 2341 - Residential Treatment for Trafficked Youth  
**Date:** March 6, 2023

The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports SB 2341 to provide better care for trafficked youth within the state's care.

The Family First Prevention Services Act incentivized states to place foster care children in a home setting as soon as possible by restricting funding for non-foster family home settings. The Act also provides some exceptions, one of them being Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTP), an exception adopted by North Dakota.

The Families First Act, however, also provides an exception for “a setting providing high-quality residential care and supportive services to children and youth who have been found to be, or are at risk of becoming, sex trafficking victims.”

From the outset of the act, therefore, Congress, recognized that trafficked youth may not be best served under the QRTP parameters. Specifically, these youth may require additional time and services not always available under the QRTP parameters. Senate Bill 2341 directs the Department of Health and Human Services to begin the process of adopting this additional option so that the state can better serve these youth.

Although she was not able to be here due today, Laura Feldmann, Executive Director of Home on the Range (HOTR)<sup>1</sup>, submitted testimony online that describes the need for this additional option and how trafficked youth can be better served if the state pursues this option. As Ms. Feldmann mentions, the best research recommends 18-24 months of residential treatment for these youth. However, due to the QRTP parameters, the average length of stay for the last year at HOTR was just under 3 months. Not surprisingly, therefore, 88% of females returning to HOTR are “youth who have been found to be, or are at risk of becoming, sex trafficking victims.”

We share in the desire to reduce long-term stays in residential facilities. Senate Bill 2341 is not an invitation to reverse course and allow unneeded long-term stays. Nor is it about HOTR. Rather, it furthers the effort to reduce long-term stays by providing this particular subset of youth the right services so that they may leave prepared and less likely to be readmitted.

We ask for a **Do Pass** recommendation on Senate Bill 2341.

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<sup>1</sup> Home on the Range operates under the auspices of the Diocese of Bismarck.