

March 6, 2023

SB 2341

North Dakota Senate Appropriations Committee

Testimony from Amy Boyd, Anti-Trafficking Program Manager, Youthworks

Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Boyd; I am the Anti-Trafficking Program Manager for Youthworks; a private, non-profit agency that serves youth, ages twelve to twenty-four. I have come before you today to testify on SB 2341.

For the past eight years, I have worked directly with youth survivors of sexual exploitation and Human Trafficking. Many of the youth that we serve have been trafficked by drug dealers, who use their products to keep our clients compliant and under their control. When they are recovered by law enforcement, they are often coming down from substances like methamphetamines, fentanyl, and heroin, as well as having experienced daily sexual assaults from buyers and their trafficker. This is an especially important time to provide safety for these youth, as they are experiencing extreme withdrawal symptoms. If they are not placed in the right setting, with the right support, the combination of complex trauma, cravings and physical discomfort of withdrawal that they have drives them back into the streets, where they are again prey to traffickers.

A statewide multi-disciplinary team: comprised of law enforcement, state's attorney offices, children advocacy centers, victim service providers, and survivor experts (people who have experienced trafficking and are now working with the team), has made the recommendation that trafficked youth be allowed to stay

longer in specialized facilities. One such facility, Home on The Range, has become our 'go-to' solution for these youth. One of the biggest barriers that our team has experienced in helping youth achieve stability is the time limit imposed on placement. Often, youth are in the middle of an investigation or prosecution into their trafficker, which are sometimes family members. If they are required to leave the facility during this time, stability is lost, as is the prosecution. In the words of one of our staff, "Supported victims make good witnesses."

We have a coordinated system in place, with capable professionals who work together to prevent trafficking, support survivors, and assist Law Enforcement in bringing traffickers to justice. We are missing a long-term, specialized facility that has the ability to keep youth safe while they do the almost impossible work of healing from trafficking. I believe SB 2341 will greatly assist our teams so we can continue the important work we're doing on behalf of extraordinarily vulnerable North Dakotans.