

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, and Standing Rock. I am here today to ask for your support for appropriations run through the Attorney Generals Office, specifically SANE funds that cover the cost of sexual assault exams and forensic interviews of children and funding for those providing services for Human Trafficking in ND.

The Children's Advocacy Centers in North Dakota are 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. Professionals from social services, law enforcement, prosecution, victim advocacy and the medical and mental health communities meet under one roof so that a child only has to tell of his or her abuse one time. Sensitivity to the needs and abilities of children is the hallmark of the children's advocacy center model which is utilized at nearly 900 Children's Advocacy Centers, in all 50 states across the country. Including eight sites here in North Dakota.

Child abuse happens in North Dakota. In 2022 Children's Advocacy Centers in ND served 2,690 people and provided 44,969 services to them. Every year our centers see children that are repeatedly sexually abused, often by those they know and trust. Some have beaten, sustained broken bones, and sometimes lifelong head injuries. Many have witnessed violence and at times been exploited through pornography and trafficking. Children's Advocacy Centers offer environments that are safe, friendly,

and warm. This welcoming atmosphere makes the situation less stressful for the child and as a result they may be more open to sharing their horrific experiences.

One of the services we offer is a forensic interview. The forensic interview process allows the child to tell their experience in a safe, child friendly environment and is used a child's statement in an investigation. The process is unique because all investigative parties participate in a single interview with the child. At Children's Advocacy Centers, one professional interviews the child in a child-friendly room. Law enforcement, prosecution and social services participate in the interview via a closed-circuit television. They contribute to the interview by prompting the interviewer to ask specific questions during breaks. With all parties involved, the interviewer can gain all necessary information to protect the child and assure that the proper steps have been followed where legal action is necessary. After a forensic interview a SANE exam is offered to the child and family to ensure that their body is okay, provide treatment and referrals if it is not and to collect evidence for criminal proceedings. Both of these services are extremely vital to not only victims but those who investigate cases.

Funding for evidence collection for SANE exams and forensic interviews flowthrough the Attorney General's budget, however, during the last biennium funding allocated to this program ran out and we were not able to recover over \$70,000 of services already provided. This has caused significant strain on CAC's, who are all small non-profits and rely on funding to continue to provide services. Unfortunately, services for both SANE exams and forensic interviews continue to increase, and we are here today to request and increase for this funding so that victims receive the expert care they need while our team partners are able to obtain forensic evidence.

I would also like to provide support for funding of programs through the Attorney Generals Office to provide services to trafficking victims in our state. As stated before, children's advocacy centers provide services to youth and young adults who have been trafficked. These cases are extremely difficult and complicated and the team response provided by the ND agencies is incredible. These teams are dedicated, passionate and selfless in their work to try and assist these youth. Funding through the Attorney Generals Office helps provide services to these youth such as counseling, advocacy, and basic needs.

Children's Advocacy Centers in ND play a critical role in ensuring the safety of abused children in our state. We greatly appreciate the support and confidence the Legislature has in the services we provide. I am the first to wish our centers could close our doors and go out of business, but until we can do so knowing that NO child in North Dakota needs our help, I ask you for your support.

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