

## Senate Appropriations – Human Resources Division

Senator Dick Dever, Chairman

January 25, 2023

Testimony of: Clete Winkelmann Executive Director | Nexus-PATH Family Healing

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### **Responding to the Children’s Behavioral Health Crisis: Request for Increased Reimbursement for Tier 2 & Tier 3 Mental Health Professionals**

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Chairman Dever and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee – Human Resources Division. My name is Clete Winkelman, Executive Director Nexus Path Family Healing. I am representing a coalition of North Dakota organizations who meet the mental health needs of North Dakotans, **The Village Family Service Center, Anne Carlsen Center, Nexus-PATH, and Essentia Health.**

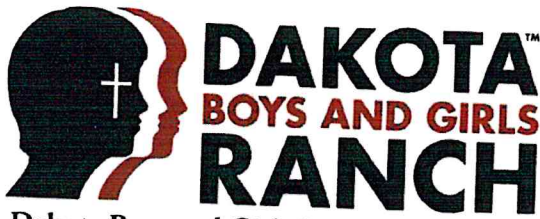
Our nation’s leading pediatric health experts recently declared the children’s behavioral health crisis so dire that it warrants a national emergency. In 2021 over 35% of ND high school students, grades 9-12, reported feeling persistent sadness or hopelessness and nearly 1 in 5 reported seriously considering dying by suicide within the past 12-months (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021), equating to approximately 6,818 youth across the state. The pandemic has only increased the need for timely access to high-quality mental health services.

**To put this number into perspective, this equates to the entire student enrollment of Bismarck State College, Dickinson State University, University of Jamestown, and Williston State College is experiencing suicidal ideation.**

Failure to ensure that mental health services are available when and where people need them has dire consequences for individuals, families and communities throughout North Dakota. In the current system, only four counties have the mental health resources their population requires. Only if you live in one of these more densely populated counties can adequate services be found.

Severely restricting access is the current payment structure. Licensed mental health providers who fall into the Tier 2 and Tier 3 categories only receive 75% of the full rate set by the ND Medical Services Professional Fee Scale. This prevents either mental health organizations or private practitioners from providing sufficient services to meet the need in North Dakota.

The fix is to change the reimbursement rate for licensed Tier 2 and Tier 3 mental health professionals to be reimbursed at 100% of the rate. This same kind of reimbursement changes were made by this legislature in 2019 for Occupational and Physical Therapy professionals to ensure access to those services. Expanding the rate change to mental health professionals will increase access in the critical area of mental health.



Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation  
7151 15th Street South | Fargo, ND 58104  
701.237.3123 | 800.344.0957

January 23, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to offer my strongest support of the increase of ND Medicaid reimbursement rates for Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral health providers. The need for a more comprehensive continuum of outpatient services for children is at an all-time high. An increase in these rates will drastically improve three key areas critical in providing services to some of our most vulnerable children. First, it will improve accessibility. Waitlists for services continue to be very long and higher reimbursement rates will help private practice and community mental health agencies big and small maintain financial viability and increase the likelihood of expanding services. Secondly, it will help increase the quality of services. Many providers in private practice limit their ND Medicaid caseload due to low reimbursement rates which leaves many non-profit community mental health agencies to take on the responsibility of serving those clients. Lastly, an increase to the Medicaid reimbursement will help address the workforce shortage by allowing agencies to offer more competitive salaries.

Dakota Family Services is a non-profit mental health care clinic with physical locations in Fargo and Minot, North Dakota. Our team of compassionate mental health professionals helps children, adolescents, and adults improve their overall mental health and well-being through their personalized approach, trusted expertise, and unconditional presence. Last year we provided in-person or virtual care to approximately two thousand patients and eleven thousand visits.

Dakota Family Services provides mental health therapy, medication management, and psychological assessments to individuals across the state of ND, in the fiscal year 2021, we served individuals in 49 of North Dakota's 53 counties. Two-thirds of the providers employed by Dakota Family Services are Tier 2 and 3 behavioral health providers and approximately 20 percent of those we serve are insured by North Dakota Medicaid. Increasing ND Medicaid reimbursement rates for Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral health providers will greatly impact the care we are able to provide individuals across the state would allow us to continue this work, expand our services to care for more Medicaid covered individuals, and allow us to work toward financial sustainability. Increased reimbursement would help us maintain our current

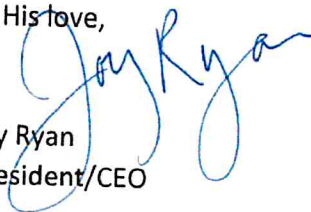
*The mission of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch is to help at-risk children and their families succeed in the name of Christ.*

Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral health providers through competitive salaries and it supports recruiting providers to support our communities' increasing needs.

We are at a critical time for improved children's behavioral health and deserve timely and accessible services. Please feel free to contact me directly at 701-551-6821 if you have any questions or concerns.

In His love,

Joy Ryan  
President/CEO



*The mission of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch is to help at-risk children and their families succeed in the name of Christ.*





*Northern Cass School District No. 97*  
*Home of the Jaguars*



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*Dr. Cory Steiner, Superintendent*  
*Doug Margerum, Secondary Principal*  
*Crysta Schenck, Elementary Principal*  
*Bryce Laxdal, Activities Director*  
*Sam Johnson, Dean of Learners*  
*Paige Carlson, Business Manager*

January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Dr. Cory Steiner and I'm the Superintendent of the Northern Cass School District in Hunter, North Dakota. I'm writing this letter of support for full reimbursement for midlevel mental health providers. As a leader of a rural school district, the importance of coordinated services in our setting is paramount. Although we are only 25 miles from Fargo, this distance is a barrier for our families. It is not possible for families to take leave from work to coordinate the various services their learner needs to be successful. By providing these services at the district level, we are better able to support our families in a place which is safe for them.

We have a licensed therapist from The Village Family Service Center in our building three days per week. This remarkable partnership has proven successful. Learners who receive services have seen an increase in their attendance rate, a decrease in discipline referrals, and more success in graduating choice ready. These services have allowed our learner to receive services free of charge on-site while not burdening families with costs for service or time to travel to the metro area. It has also eliminated the 'wait time' to get an appointment with a licensed therapist. In my years of education, this has simply been the most powerful and positive initiative and partnership I have ever been a part of.

I am writing to offer my strongest support for the increase of ND Medicaid reimbursement rates for Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral health providers. The need for a more comprehensive continuum of outpatient services for children is at an all-time high. An increase in these rates will drastically improve three key areas critical in providing services to some of our most vulnerable children. First, it will improve accessibility. Waitlists for services continue to be exceptionally long and higher reimbursement rates will help private practice and community mental health agencies big and small maintain financial viability and increase the likelihood of expanding services. Secondly, it will help increase the quality of services. Many providers in private practice limit their ND Medicaid caseload due to low reimbursement rates which leaves many non-profit community mental health agencies to take on the responsibility of serving those clients. Lastly, an increase to the Medicaid reimbursement will help address the workforce shortage by allowing agencies to offer more competitive salaries.

As we continue to learn more about the importance of health and its impact on academic outcomes, it makes it necessary for districts to provide more services which better meet their individual needs. We know healthy learners are successful both in and out of school. The research is compelling. Healthy learners live happier and more productive lives in adulthood. By providing more services in our district, we are ensuring learning the opportunity to be successful both in their future careers and personal lives. It is our belief that a 'community in schools' approach will best serve our learners and communities. It is with great excitement that our district begins to move in this direction.

However, education has continued to grow more complex, and schools have continually been asked to provide more services to meet the growing needs of our learners. Currently, our special education unit (Rural Cass) takes advantage of reimbursement. By providing full reimbursement for midlevel health providers, this could assist schools in offsetting general expenditures. We pay an assessment to the unit for special education services. If we received a higher reimbursement, it would allow us to reduce the special assessment which would allow our general fund to extend in other areas. Since 2014-15, our special

education assessments have increased by 90% at Northern Cass while educational funding has failed to increase at anything close to a similar rate. By reducing the assessments, it allows us to use our general fund in other areas which we would 'route' to our Full-Service Community Schools commitment. This commitment is in partnership with Essentia Health of Fargo. The increased funding would allow us to continue providing current mental health services while adding essential services in other key areas which are lacking in our district and communities.

We are at a critical time for improved children's behavioral health and deserve timely and accessible services. Please feel free to email me at [Cory.Steiner@northerncassschool.com](mailto:Cory.Steiner@northerncassschool.com) or call 701-874-2322 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Dr. Cory J. Steiner  
Superintendent of Schools



# Behavioral Health Tiered System

The tiered system of behavioral health is defined in North Dakota Century Code and administrative rules

<b>Tier 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1a - Psychiatrist, psychologist</li><li>• 1b - Physician, physician assistant, advanced practice registered nurse</li></ul>
<b>Tier 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2a - Licensed independent clinical social worker, licensed professional clinical counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist</li><li>• 2b - Licensed addiction counselor, registered nurse</li></ul>
<b>Tier 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Licensed professional counselor, licensed associate professional counselor, licensed certified social worker, licensed associate marriage and family therapist, occupational therapist, licensed practical nurse, behavior analyst, vocational rehabilitation counselor, school psychologist, human relations counselor</li></ul>
<b>Tier 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct care associates, technicians</li></ul>