

Good morning Madam Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Robyn Litke Sall. I am a resident of Fargo and a substance misuse prevention coordinator at Fargo Cass Public Health (FCPH). I have coordinated our agency's opioid response program for Cass County since 2016. I am testifying in opposition to the portion of House Bill 1447 that mandates our local opioid settlement funds be surrendered to the State. FCPH is a department of the City of Fargo (City) and will be utilizing the City's opioid settlement funds for opioid response activities. The City should be able to have local control over their settlement funds due to the large scope of our area's opioid epidemic, the history of local successes in opioid response, a developed plan for the use of settlement funds, and the significant amount of funds the City of Fargo has and will continue to devote to opioid response.

Fargo Cass Public Health (FCPH) began formalized opioid response work the summer of 2016 by assigning a dedicated staff member to the work 20 hours per week. A city commissioner, the public health director, and health officer were also very involved in leading the response. FCPH was instrumental in establishing the Mayors' Blue Ribbon Commission on Addiction to mobilize a community response to the opioid crisis. The City provided \$50,000 in general funds to address the crisis, and has continued to dedicate \$50,000 to FCPH annually for this purpose. Since April 2018, the City has funded a significant portion of FCPH's Harm Reduction Center's (HRC) services and supplies, due to insufficient grant funds, and federal funding restrictions. Since August 2017, FCPH has received an opioid response grant from the North Dakota Department of Human Services, Behavioral Health Division (BHD), which originates with the federal government. Unfortunately, despite alarming increases in the number of community members lost to opioid-related deaths the most recent grant cut funding by 14%. According to the Cass County Coroner, there was a 40% increase in opioid-related deaths from 2019-2020, and a further increase of 57% from 2020-2021. There were 21 opioid-related deaths in Cass County in 2020, and 33 in 2021. Preliminarily, 2022's statistics are comparable to 2021. There's no way to know for sure the number of non-fatal opioid overdoses in Cass County, but the number of self-reported opioid overdose reversals using naloxone is staggering- 553 were reported last fiscal year. That's over one and a half per day!

In November 2017, FCPH placed Narcan in all Cass county schools and provided training to school staff. In March 2018, FCPH hosted the region's first public opioid overdose response and naloxone administration training. In April 2018, FCPH hosted the region's first peer recovery coach training, and opened the Harm Reduction Center. These are just a few of many early successes in FCPH's opioid response. FCPH has been a trailblazer and leader in opioid response and has provided presentations, training, and technical assistance to programs throughout the state and country.

Most recently, during fiscal year 2022- October 2021 thru September 2022- FCPH promoted prevention and anti-stigma campaigns, reduced access to prescription drugs, provided opioid overdose response and naloxone administration training, distributed naloxone, reduced barriers to treatment, operated an HRC, and implemented the Narcan Leave Behind Program and the ONE Program.

During fiscal year 2022, FCPH promoted the substance use prevention program ParentsLead.org by creating 121 social media posts reaching 20,525 individuals, participating in two community events and a news conference, and distributing 1,079 promotional materials. An overdose prevention campaign resulted in 130 social media posts reaching 55,635, 13 news stories, production of a video, and numerous International Overdose Awareness Day activities. A substance use disorder stigma-reduction campaign produced 58 social media posts reaching 13,809. A stigma-reduction campaign for harm reduction services yielded 136 social media posts reaching 35,244. Nine presentations reaching 233 individuals educated about harm reduction. FCPH reduced access to prescription opioids by creating 67 medication disposal education social media posts reaching 12,520, participating in two community events, and distributing 710 Deterra medication disposal bags.

FCPH conducted 63 opioid overdose response trainings, resulting in 743 individuals trained. A total of 3,797 naloxone kits with 7,594 doses were distributed. There were 1,076 reported doses of naloxone administered

resulting in 553 opioid overdose reversals using naloxone from FCPH. This equates to one and a half lives being saved every day!

Nasal Narcan, a form of naloxone, is provided by FCPH to first responders including the Fargo, West Fargo, and NDSU Police Departments, the Cass County Sheriff's Office, and the Fargo and West Fargo Fire Departments. Public libraries and municipal buildings in Fargo and West Fargo, and all school districts in Cass County have Narcan. Hundreds of other organizations have also received training and Narcan, and any organization or individual in Cass County can receive them. Naloxone is also distributed at the HRC in downtown Fargo.

FCPH's HRC had 5,798 visits serving 976 individuals, including 368 new clients. Program participants received referrals, education, and supplies. Referrals were given for substance use disorder treatment, healthcare, opioid use disorder medication providers, behavioral health services, social services, shelter, food pantries, and more. Onsite testing and education about HIV and hepatitis C were provided, as well as education on harm reduction, safer sex, proper sharps disposal, and opioid overdose response and naloxone administration. The program supplied safer injection and safer sex supplies, naloxone, fentanyl testing strips, sharps disposal containers, and COVID-19 at-home tests. A total of 5,585 doses of naloxone were provided. The past two years (2021-2022), a life was saved 920 times when an opioid overdose was reversed using naloxone provided through this program. June thru September 2022, 770 fentanyl testing strips were provided.

To reduce barriers to treatment, FCPH provided cab rides to the Opioid Treatment Program for patients unable to afford transportation to onsite daily medication dosing. Hundreds of rides were provided each month. An average of 8 individuals received rides monthly.

FCPH implemented the Opioid & Naloxone Education (ONE) Program in April. Through this program, home health nurses screened patients with a prescription opioid and provide education, resources, and support to ensure safe opioid use. April thru September 2022, 180 clients were screened, and 16 medication lock boxes and 36 Deterra medication disposal bags were provided. Six patients received opioid misuse and overdose prevention education, and Narcan.

In July 2022, FCPH implemented the Narcan Leave Behind Program with the Fargo and West Fargo Fire Departments. At overdose scenes, firefighters leave Narcan with willing individuals, as well as links to resources like Narcan training, treatment options, and requests for additional Narcan.

This current fiscal year- October 2022 thru September 2023- FCPH is continuing these activities. There are currently three fulltime positions solely dedicated to opioid response work, with several additional staff providing support ranging from a few hours per month to several hours a week. FCPH truly is a leader in the state for opioid mitigation activities.

The plan for the City's opioid settlement funds is to build on our previous activities including coordination of a community opioid response coalition, distributing naloxone throughout the community and training on use, with a focus on high-risk groups, and maintaining, improving and innovating a comprehensive, needs-based harm reduction program. The Red River Recovery Initiative, a coalition previously administered thru Essentia Health, will be sponsored by FCPH starting in April. A staff member was recently hired to coordinate the Red River Recovery Initiative. The coalition will engage community stakeholders to advise and plan local opioid response activities current and future.

In closing, I respectfully request your consideration allowing our local Cities and County to keep current and future settlement funds in light of the lives our community has lost, the monetary costs we have and will continue to incur, the success our work has achieved, and our established plan to continue mitigating the opioid crisis. Any change in control and accessibility to these funds will jeopardize our ability to do our job and respond to the crisis at hand.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.