

**Testimony**  
**Engrossed House Bill No. 1534**  
**Senate Human Services Committee**  
**Senator Judy Lee, Chairman**  
**March 15, 2023**

Chairman Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Cory Pedersen, Director of the Children and Family Services Section (CFS) with the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I appear before you to provide information to Engrossed House Bill 1534.

CFS has been facilitating a work group to discuss the need to offer efficiencies and better streamline the foster and adoption home study efforts. Adults Adopting Special Kids (AASK), the vendor contracted with the Department for subsidized adoption, together with the CFS Adoption Foster Care Licensing Units, have been reviewing forms and making efforts to eliminate duplication wherever possible. Senate Bill 2080, which passed out of this Committee in the first half of the session, is representative of some of the work group's efforts to date.

This work group has identified that we have two processes working often working in parallel to each other, completing assessments through two related by different lenses. The foster care lens represents a temporary placement while the adoption lens represents a lifetime commitment. Our experience tells us that this dual assessment impacts approximately 13% of the licensed foster care provider population.

Overall, adoption assessments are more comprehensive than the current foster care study process. In adoption we are looking to assess the family's ability to provide for the child's safety and well-being for a lifetime, without

the supports of an agency that can step in if there are difficulties, or the placement destabilizes.

The "investigation" as referenced in North Dakota Century Code chapter 14-15, and required for most adoption hearings, is more than an adoptive family home study. It provides not only information about the adoptive family, but also the child and birth family, and includes a narrative that summarized the child's placement in the home and a formal recommendation by the agency for the finalization. All of this information is taken into consideration by the Judge who is making the finalization decision.

The language proposed in House Bill 1534 will not change the requirement that the family complete background checks for adoption that are separate from foster care as that is a federal requirement of the FBI.

What we expect this bill would do is slow down the foster care license, certification, and approved processes for the approximately 87 percent of foster parents who will never adopt.

The newly centralized CFS Licensing Unit is less than one year old (authorized via 2021 Senate Bill 2086). We are committed to looking for areas where we can improve and streamline processes, with the goal of becoming more efficient for our providers while balancing what is best for the children and their families.

This concludes my testimony, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.