Senate Human Services Committee
Testimony In Support of Senate Bill #2051
1-4-23

Madam 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 Senate Bill 2051.

Last session legislators passed a law to allow us the ability to conduct fingerprint background checks to better protect the children we see. Our CACs have always run background checks for our employees, board members, and volunteers. But this statute allowed us to strengthen the process so we could have a higher level of screening by including a fingerprint background check. This also allowed us to meet guidelines to receive federal funding, which all of our programs rely on to do the important work we do. However, fingerprint background checks, which is the most rigorous check, is only available when legislated by states and approved by the FBI. The FBI is requesting that we add some clarifying language to the statute, and we are here today to try and accomplish that.

The changes in this bill are twofold.

First it removes the language about "multidisciplinary team member," as this was too broad of a term that would included our partners on child abuse cases, such as law enforcement, human services personnel, and prosecutors, many of who already do background checks within their own agencies.

Second, the bill adds the language “board member” which allows our CACs to screen these leaders at the same level as employees. Although board members do not often work directly with children, it’s a necessary inclusion because our board members are the face of our organization, and the face of child safety in the community. Fingerprint background screening of board members is also an accreditation standard, which all CAC’s must meet to receive funding. Previously we included board members under the section of volunteers, as all of our Boards are made up of volunteer members, however, separating this out adds the additional clarifying language being requested.

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