

Testimony
Senate Bill No. 2152
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Lee, Chairman
January 18, 2023

Chairman Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Lachesha Graham, Manager of Addiction Treatment & Recovery Program & Policy with the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I appear before you today with neutral testimony for Senate Bill No. 2152.

Recovery Residences, also known as recovery homes, sober living homes, or recovery houses, refer to a safe and healthy living environment free from alcohol and illicit drugs that supports individuals in recovery from addiction. Recovery housing benefits individuals by reinforcing a lifestyle free from alcohol and illicit substances and providing direct connections to peers in recovery and recovery services and supports.

Recovery Housing is an important aspect of the behavioral health continuum of care. Research indicates recovery housing provides individuals with a substance use disorder a greater chance of achieving long term recovery, reductions in returning to substance use, lower rates of incarceration, increase employment and improved family functioning.

According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, eleven states have voluntary certification of recovery residences, and two states require recovery residences to have a certification to operate.

In 2018, the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the current behavioral health system in North Dakota. The study identified recommendations to address housing alongside behavioral health needs and to promote timely linkage to community-based services following crisis, inpatient, and residential treatment. In consideration of the recommendations for housing, the 66th Legislative Assembly provided \$200,000 in funding to the Department to develop and implement a new Recovery Housing Assistance Program (RHAP). Due to COVID-19, implementation was delayed, and \$150,000 of the funding was carried-over to the 2021-2023 biennium for a biennium total of \$350,000. The RHAP launched in May 2022. The program pays for up to 12 weeks of an eligible individual's living expenses at an approved Recovery Housing provider. An eligible individual must be a North Dakota resident, 18 or older, experiencing a substance use disorder, and be enrolled in a Department of Health & Human Services Public Assistance Program or have a household income at or below the 200% Federal Poverty Guideline. Since the Recovery Housing Assistance Program launch in May 2022 to December 2022, the program has entered into agreements with 10 Recovery Houses and provided recovery housing support to 177 individuals with a total of \$140,750 reimbursed.

The Department asks the committee to take into account several key factors when considering Senate Bill No. 2152, including the cost and resources to develop and implement such a program that recovery houses may not utilize. The Department is requesting half of an FTE to develop and manage the certification program for a cost of \$133,033 general fund.

Another consideration is that the national alliance for recovery residences does not certify recovery residences in the manner identified. Rather they approve non-government agencies as affiliates within the states such as recovery organizations, behavioral health coalitions, or larger recovery housing networks to certify the houses.

Lastly, there is no list of current recovery houses in North Dakota and no list that identifies where they are or what models are utilized. Developing a registry for recovery houses in the state similar to the Mental Health Registry would benefit individuals and referral sources who are trying to locate and access recovery housing support.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.