

Senate Human Services Committee
SB 2155
January 30, 2023

Chairman Lee and Senate Human Services Committee Members:

I am pleased to present my written testimony in support of SB 2155. This bill will provide an appropriation to North Dakota Health and Human Services for grants to the state's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC); and to provide for a legislative management study on expanding the number of FQHC's – sometimes referred to as community health centers – in North Dakota.

My experience with community health centers in North Dakota has been positive. In my role with Grand Forks Public Health, we worked to bring a community health center to our region, and it has made a huge impact on our ability to achieve public health goals. Specifically, community health centers provide critical medical, behavioral, and dental care for residents who find it difficult to access this care, and as a result there has been an increase in population health indicators among the patients served by health centers.

Community health centers sustain a needed community resource for the most vulnerable North Dakotans. From my experience as a public health professional in Grand Forks, it was common for residents to not receive care for newly diagnosed tuberculosis, delay preventive services such as vaccinations and health screenings, and go years without behavioral health or dental care. We sought to close these gaps through the Alliance for Healthcare Access and the Northern Valley Dental Coalition. From that work, Spectra Health was established to serve residents of our region. A key service that health centers provide is care coordination and case management, ensuring that patients do not experience barriers and receive the highest quality and most efficient care possible. Examples of successful collaboration are the addiction services that Spectra Health provides through the state opioid treatment program and to clients of the Grand Forks Withdrawal Management Center, and cancer screening services through the Women's Way program.

Spectra Health has established itself as a key community partner working side by side with Grand Forks Public Health and other health and human service organizations to provide cost effective care and fill gaps in service delivery. Spectra Health has been a fantastic partner throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. We can no longer imagine meeting the needs of all the residents of our community without their robust community outreach efforts.

An appropriation of state funds would offset the costs of the uncompensated care that health centers deliver and would allow them to provide medical, behavioral, and oral health services to more patients. Grand Forks is not the only community that would benefit from the comprehensive whole-person primary care that is provided at a community health center. The

model is able to be replicated in many other communities in our state creating jobs in the health care field that are needed in all corners of North Dakota.

I encourage you to support this important investment in access to quality health care in all regions of North Dakota, and **pass Senate Bill 2155**. Thank you for letting me share my experience with you today.

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