

Dale Wolf

District 21-02

Senate Bill NO. 2166

My name is Dale Wolf and I am the founding pastor of Lighthouse Church in downtown Fargo. The Lighthouse is a recovery-based ministry that strives to provide a place of love, encouragement, hope and recovery for anyone seeking help. Recovery is defined broadly at Lighthouse. People recover from many things in life. Lighthouse has a basic spiritual philosophy that every individual is created by God and should be valued. At Lighthouse, people can come as they are and be welcomed, accepted, and find support.

As you may know, our metropolitan community of Fargo has seen a significant uptick in substance use and mental health issues. I know that is not unique to Fargo. We have seen many changes in the community and social services provided to the people we serve. The Lighthouse has found itself at the center of striving to address this growing crisis.

As a Recovery Community Organization (RCO), the Lighthouse houses a variety of anonymous groups (NA, AA, Al Anon, SA, RA), support groups for various mental health issues (depression, anxiety, abuse), and a thriving Celebrate Recovery program. Lighthouse also has regular church programs as well as children's and youth ministry. The general population of Lighthouse Church, and the Lighthouse RCO is under-resourced.

Over my years of serving in leadership at the Lighthouse I have seen and learned much. Daily I encounter the challenges of substance use disorder and mental health issues. I have seen the barriers that people face when they want to improve their lives. I have seen the pain and cost of isolation and loneliness. I have seen the reality that there is no easy or quick fix. Recovery and life change is a long-term journey and investment. I often remind our staff that we are in a marathon with people, not a sprint. I have also seen the universal need for love and acceptance and hope. In order to begin the recovery process, people need to establish a foundation of support, accountability, and help. Lighthouse has and is providing these things and more for countless individuals. I have also witnessed life change, growth, and miracles every week. **(You will hear more about that in a couple of minutes.)**

Lighthouse has been a provider for the North Dakota programs Free Through Recovery and Community Connect since their beginning. We have been honored to partner with the state to provide services to hundreds of men and women in these programs over the years. We have strived for excellence in both care coordination and peer support service and have developed a great reputation, not only in our own community, but across the state. We have also sought to bring the Lighthouse into the North Dakota Correctional Facilities. Today, our Sunday services are shown in three correctional facilities in ND, and we hope to expand that in the near future.

When we learned about the program 1915i, and the same services we had been providing becoming Medicaid billable, we decided to get involved. Our goal has never been to make money, but to help people. The higher levels of service provided for in 1915i is something sorely needed. We see it every day. We made the investment to enroll, register staff to be able to provide service, learned and strived to adapt to the administrative requirements and challenges, and were amongst the first to get started. As of today, I believe we are still the only provider billing for 1915i peer support services in the state. We believe the program hinges on peer support and it is the crucial link to the overall life-change and growth for the people we serve.

Unfortunately, we have learned that there are barriers for smaller, non-traditional providers like us to become established in providing the various 1915i services needed in our community. In order to continue to meet the growing crisis we are honored to be here with the hopes that you see the value in partnering with an organization like us who are on the front line in this difficult, but important work.

We are seeking funding to help us meet the variety of services in the current programs we work with, but particularly 1915i. The complexity of providing services and billing Medicaid for 1915i is significant. We find the billing procedures and the policy requirements to be substantial, and more than we were prepared for administratively. Requested funds will first be utilized to organizationally develop the administrative capacity to grow our programs as the demand grows. Support is also needed to expand our peer support services to address the diverse population we serve. Current reimbursement rates make it nearly impossible to do so. That is the reason for a proposed amendment to the bill.

We are also seeking to administratively organize in such a way so as to better link our state services along with the Lighthouse RCO and developing services for those in need. We would like to expand our peer support services to be able to serve the needs of people who are not eligible for reimbursed services, or who are simply unable to make the step towards such services at this time. We see a growing need for mental health support in our community and are aware that therapists and medical professionals refer people to us for basic support and assistance. We would like to develop supportive services around the growing mental health crisis. Finally, in addition to other programs and outreach, we would like to increase our efforts in the correctional facilities of North Dakota and bring the same kind of encouragement and hope people find at Lighthouse to those incarcerated.

I thank you for your time and your consideration, and I look forward to answering any questions you might have. But first, I would like you to hear from three of the Lighthouse family I brought with me today.