

Testimony Prepared for the
Senate Human Services Committee

February 13, 2023

By: Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

RE: Senate Bill 2341 – Certified Family Foster Care Homes

Chair Lee and members of the House Human Services Committee, my name is Kim Jacobson. I am the Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director, which includes the service area of Traill and Steele Counties. In addition, I serve as President of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. Please consider my testimony in support of SB 2341.

In North Dakota, Human Service Zone Directors serve as the legal custodian of foster children. In this role, human service zones are charged with the legal authority and duty to place foster children and to provide case management services. This is a critical and important responsibility and one that brings many challenges.

One such challenge is finding appropriate, responsive, and sustainable placement for each child in our child welfare system. There are many complexities, nuances, policies, and laws that impact the placement of children. However, this situation becomes additionally challenging when searching for placement for children with complex needs and when trying to place sibling groups together.

SB 2341 would establish certified foster homes that would help create nimbleness for our licensing process. Many individuals express the interest in caring for foster children. However, the full foster care licensing process is at times daunting and is a significant commitment. Certification provides flexibility in licensure type and provides families and/or those with a relationship with a child, an opportunity to experience being a foster care home prior to making the full commitment to full licensure. This licensing option is missing from our

current placement system, yet successful in other states. Adding this option would be helpful in meeting the needs of North Dakota's foster youth and for enhancing placement options.

It is important for the committee to be informed about another bill that addresses the need for certified foster care homes, HB 1091. This bill, which has passed the House and will be forwarded to the Senate upon crossover, is very similar to SB 2341. However, HB 1091 contains additional critical language regarding funding flexibilities that are critically needed to provide flexibility and support to families helping care for relative children engaged in the child welfare system. Therefore, while I stand in support of SB 2341 today, I believe the language in SB 2341 better addresses North Dakota's overall need related to certified foster homes and kinship family homes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I stand for questions from the committee.