



**House Appropriations-Human Resources Committee
HB 1264 Testimony
March 21, 2023
Senator Larson, Chair**

Good morning, Chairman Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I am Carlotta McCleary, Executive Director of Mental Health America of North Dakota and Executive Director of the North Dakota Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. Today I speak on behalf of the Mental Health Advocacy Network (MHAN). MHAN advocates for a consumer/family driven mental health system of care that provides an array of service choices that are timely, responsive and effective. Our vision is for every North Dakotan to have access to the right service—whether it be preventative, treatment, or recovery; at the right time—when the service is needed; and at the right place—as near his or her home as possible. MHAN is testifying in support of HB 1264. MHAN has continued to echo the findings of two Schulte Reports (2014, 2022) and two HSRI reports (2018,) that North Dakota has a mental health systems crisis stemming from a lack of services, especially community-based services. A frequent consequence of community service shortages are individuals coming into contact with law enforcement and the justice system. Our law enforcement and justice system partners are often at a loss for what to do with individuals who are presenting with significant mental health needs, or may not even be aware of an individual's needs. As we are collaborating on CIT trainings with our law enforcement community, we have been hearing from them and other first responders that they have a better handle on those who have substance use issues and how to help them but are caught unaware of those with mental health and/or brain injury issues.

As Dan Gulya, Attorney from North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project (P&A) previously testified, the Individual Justice Plan (IJP) model originated in the developmental disability community as a means to divert those individuals from involvement with the justice system when issues arise from behaviors that are as a result of their cognitive disabilities. For a number of years, MHAN's member organizations have partnered with P&A to promote the IJP model and the updated materials that P&A has created. We have continued to see the IJP model as having great promise for addressing the needs of people with mental illness, brain injuries, and their families.

For a number of years, Mental Health America of North Dakota and the North Dakota Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health have partnered with local law enforcement and first responder agencies to provide CIT training to their and other related workforces through a consumer panel. This panel provides CIT trainees the opportunity to listen to people with lived experience with mental health needs, brain injuries, and/or addiction issues discuss their story and provide information about how they perceive events during a crisis. The intention is for our law enforcement and first responder workforce to have greater awareness of the needs of these citizens and help them better interact with persons who have a behavioral health needs or cognitive difficulties due to a brain injury or a developmental disability.

During these interactions, it has been common for this workforce to be unaware of the existence of IJPs. It has also been common for this workforce to be enthusiastic about the prospect of having such a tool to utilize before they even arrive on scene with someone who has a behavioral health disorder or a brain injury. Not only would they have a better idea of how to interact with them, they would have a better idea of how to better serve them. They also believe that through the IJP process, there are a number of individuals who would not need to be criminally charged in the first place.

In North Dakota, we have over 30,000 adults with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) and over 18,000 children with Serious Emotional Disorders. That's nearly 50,000 North Dakotans, the overwhelming majority of whom are not receiving community-based mental health services. When individuals are not receiving the help they need, they tend to have increased contact with law enforcement and are involved in the justice system. Over the

last decade, North Dakota saw that in both the adult and juvenile corrections systems. While most people with serious mental health issues who do not need IJPs, there are many who could benefit from them. We urge the passage of HB 1264.

Thank you and I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Carlotta McCleary
Spokesperson
Mental Health Advocacy Network
Phone: (701) 222-3310
E-mail: cmccleary@ndffcmh.com