

Testimony in support of:

**House Bill 1012, with the 2025-27 Health & Human Services Executive Budget
Recommendation for Appropriations to Federally Qualified Health Centers**

January 27, 2025

Chairman Nelson, Vice Chair Stemen, and Committee Members:

My name is Rachel Thomas, and I work for Northland Health Centers as the Chief Financial Officer. Northland Health Centers serves eight communities in the central and northern areas of the state, with most of these communities having less than 500 individuals in the cities' populations. We provide primary medical, dental, and behavioral health care services, as well as medication-assisted treatment services in nearly all our communities.

On behalf of Northland Health Centers and our patients, I want to express our appreciation for the previous appropriations of state resources to community health centers. Our care teams and patients have seen firsthand the positive impact of these state appropriations, which have helped us fill gaps and respond to unmet needs in our communities.

Thanks to the state appropriations, we have been able to expand our behavioral health department. By the end of this spring, our behavioral health team will have nearly doubled. We plan to use our current year two funding towards opening a second location here in Bismarck, where the primary focus will be behavioral health care. By providing hometown behavioral health services as part of primary care, we can reduce the risk of preventable ER admissions and costly treatments.

In addition to gaps in behavioral health, our team observed another trend in rural communities – Individuals, including Veterans, struggling to access dentures. This can lead to difficulty eating and speaking clearly, among other challenges. In response, we were able to leverage our state investment to increase access to dentures for Veterans in our communities. This was deeply appreciated by patients. One patient commented, “I really really appreciate what you guys are doing. Once I am all done and get ‘em fitted, it’s going to change things quite a bit. I will be able to eat something besides soup!” Comments like this are why we do what we do everyday.

Today, we ask for your continued support for appropriating funds to community health centers, as listed in the 2025-2027 Health & Human Services Executive Budget Recommendation. This will allow us to expand our reach, invest in our communities, and fill gaps in care. Thank you for your consideration.