

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 Jennie Cornell, and I am the Behavioral Health Supervisor at Northland Health Centers, as well as a licensed clinical social worker and licensed master addiction counselor. In my role as both a practicing provider and supervisor, I witness firsthand the growing need for mental health and substance use treatment in western North Dakota. As demand for these services continues to rise, Northland Health Centers is committed to expanding our behavioral health services to meet these critical needs and enhance the well-being of our communities.

North Dakota is experiencing a behavioral health crisis, with high rates of substance use disorders (SUDs) and mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and trauma, affecting individuals across our state. However, many people—especially in rural and underserved areas—lack access to the care they need. As a provider of integrated primary and behavioral health care, I see the consequences of this daily, including long waitlists, geographic isolation, and financial barriers that prevent individuals from seeking help. This often leads to delayed treatment, which exacerbates the problem and results in preventable crises.

In response to this growing need, Northland Health Centers is expanding our behavioral health services to provide more accessible care to those in need. One of the key components of our expansion is the establishment of a new clinic in Bismarck. This new clinic will significantly increase our capacity to provide mental health and substance use treatment, offering much-needed space to serve more individuals and families in the region.

By opening this new facility, we will be able to offer a broader range of behavioral health services, including counseling, therapy, medication management, and substance use treatment, all under one roof. This integrated care approach is crucial to ensuring that individuals with mental health and substance use concerns receive comprehensive treatment in a timely manner. The Bismarck clinic will also help address the increasing demand for care in this urban area, where many individuals have struggled to find available services due to capacity limitations.

Expanding our services in Bismarck, in addition to our other locations, will reduce wait times and improve access to treatment for those living in both rural and urban parts of our region. We are confident that this expansion will have a positive impact not only on individual patients but also on the overall health of our community by addressing behavioral health needs earlier and more effectively.

Northland Health Centers remains dedicated to providing high-quality, integrated care to those facing mental health and substance use challenges. With the establishment of our new Bismarck clinic and our continued expansion of services, we are better equipped to meet the urgent need for treatment and improve outcomes for individuals throughout western North Dakota.

Thank you for your ongoing support as we continue to grow and enhance the services that are so vital to the health and well-being of our communities.