



**House Appropriations - Human Resources Division
HB 1012 – Medical Services
January 27, 2025**

Chairperson Rep. Nelson and Members of the Committee,

I am Kirsten Dvorak, executive director of The Arc of North Dakota. For 65 years, we have championed the human rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), advocating for services and supports that empower them to lead meaningful, independent lives across North Dakota.

While opportunities for collaboration have been created through the Cross-Disability Advisory Council (CDAC), access to home and community-based services remains inadequate. Significant gaps persist in areas such as mental health services for children with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and support for families navigating complex care needs. These challenges must be addressed to ensure that all North Dakotans with disabilities have access to comprehensive care. Refining the Level of Care criteria, which determines eligibility for specific services based on an individual's functional needs and medical conditions, is essential to closing service gaps and guaranteeing support for everyone in need, from birth to death.

The Arc of North Dakota strongly supports full funding for the CDAC and its efforts to advise the department toward a new waiver. Through collaboration with stakeholders, families, and service providers, the CDAC has fostered meaningful change. Over the biennium, the council established a strong foundation for the new cross-disability waiver by delivering actionable recommendations to streamline services, enhance access, and improve outcomes statewide.

This journey began with the 2021 legislative study under SB 2256, which proposed the Children's Cross-Disability Waiver and continued with the creation of the CDAC through SB 2276 in 2023. These initiatives have already fostered collaboration and innovation, addressing systemic disparities and ensuring equitable care for children aged 3 to 21 with disabilities and complex health needs. Fully funding this initiative will streamline services, boost efficiency, and establish a cohesive care system statewide.

A foundational element of the newly proposed waiver is paid family caregiving, acknowledging the critical role families play in providing care and supporting the well-being of their loved ones. The findings from Alvarez and Marsal's review of the Department of Human Services (DHS) waiver system underscored significant service gaps for children with social deficits. It emphasized the need for family-centered education and support. These findings reinforce the importance of creating a robust and inclusive support network tailored to individual and family needs.

The proposed changes to the CDAC (SB2113) will focus on refining its mission to address the Level of Care criteria, ensuring that individuals with lived experience, such as adults with disabilities and family members of children receiving Medicaid services, contribute critical perspectives to this work. These new members will bring vital perspectives to the council's work, mainly refining the Level of Care criteria. By incorporating firsthand insights, CDAC aims to develop practical, equitable solutions to address service gaps and create a more inclusive care system. Their contributions will be pivotal in ensuring that the council's recommendations reflect the diverse needs of North Dakotans.

Investing in this initiative strengthens individual futures while fostering inclusive and supportive communities throughout North Dakota. The Arc of North Dakota urges the committee to prioritize funding for the Cross-Disability Advisory Council and the Children's Waiver. These initiatives exemplify North Dakota's commitment to valuing all its citizens' dignity, potential, and rights.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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