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YMCA of The Northern Sky  
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## Written Testimony for North Dakota HB 1012

### Submitted by: YMCA of the Northern Sky

Good morning, members of the Committee,  
My name is Tania Zerr, and I am the Executive Director of Child Care Programs for the YMCA of the Northern Sky. I am writing to share how Quality Improvement Grants have positively impacted our programs and to strongly encourage you to maintain funding for these vital initiatives.

### Overview of Our Programs

The YMCA of the Northern Sky serves over 2,300 children annually daily across our communities of Fargo, West Fargo, and Moorhead. We employ over 450 staff members, both full- and part-time, and operate:

- **4 Early Childhood Learning Centers**, two of which also provide afterschool care.
- **21 school-age afterschool programs** which are located throughout those communities.

Here is an overview of the children served at each Early Childhood location:

- **Fercho YMCA** (licensed since 1986): 8 infants, 10 toddlers, 75 preschoolers, 75 school-age children.
- **Schlossman YMCA** (licensed since 1997): 68 preschoolers, 80 school-age children.
- **West Fargo YMCA** (licensed since 2002): 24 infants, 20 toddlers, 128 preschoolers.
- **South at Urban Plains** (licensed since June 2023): 32 infants, 30 toddlers, 122 preschoolers, 60 school-age children. (Previously YMCA South (licensed since 1999) and (Previously YMCA Calvary (licensed since 2012)

All of our programs have historically been accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). However, as the state introduced its Quality Rating System, we shifted our focus to Bright & Early ND due to the financial feasibility and the invaluable support it provides.

### Achievements Through Bright & Early ND

We have been actively participating in the Bright & Early ND Quality Rating System since its inception. Three of our four Early Childhood programs are proud to be Step 3 programs, with one location actively working toward Step 3. The coaching, technical assistance, training, and funding provided by this initiative have been instrumental in helping us maintain high-quality programming for the children and families we serve.

### Use of Quality Improvement Grants

In 2023, we received grant funding that allowed us to make critical investments in our programs. Specifically:

- **Expansion and Growth:** We added infant classrooms at both our West Fargo location and our South at Urban Plains location using GROW Grant funding. This expansion would not have been possible without this financial support, which enabled us to meet increasing community demand for child care.
- **Facility Improvements:** Remodeling projects are prohibitively expensive for child care programs. For example, adding a single sink and tiling to a classroom at our West Fargo location cost \$35,000. Without grant funds, these essential improvements would not have been possible.

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- **Equipment and Supplies:** We updated outdated equipment, shelving, cribs, chairs, and tables—some of which had been in use since our programs first opened.

### **Why These Grants Matter**

Child care programs operate on extremely tight budgets, with 90% of revenue coming from parent tuition fees. Our largest expenses are staff salaries and benefits. Without Quality Improvement Grants, we could not afford the updates and investments necessary to provide safe, high-quality learning environments for our children. These grants ensure that we can meet state standards, expand our capacity, and offer the resources our staff need to deliver excellent care.

### **Impact on the Community**

The funding provided through these grants doesn't just benefit our programs; it strengthens the entire community. When we can expand infant care, update equipment, and train our staff, we directly support working families and contribute to the development of the next generation.

### **Closing**

I urge you to maintain funding for Quality Improvement Grants. The \$2 million being considered for cuts would jeopardize the progress child care providers like the YMCA of the Northern Sky have made in enhancing the quality of care. These grants are not just investments in programs—they are investments in children, families, and the future of North Dakota.

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

Sincerely,

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