



North Dakota Training Academy *for* Addiction Professionals

Testimony of Denise Andress

ND Training Academy for Addiction Professionals

In Support of HB 1012

House Appropriations Committee - Human Resources Division

February 5, 2025

Good morning, Chair Nelson and members of the committee. My name is Denise Andress, and I am the director of the Training Academy for Addiction Professionals (TAAP). I am here today to testify in support of HB 1012, specifically the opioid settlement appropriation outlined on page five, section eight. A few weeks ago, the CEO of the Heartview Foundation, Kurt Snyder, spoke about the OSF funding TAAP received in January 2024. Today, I would like to take a few moments to discuss the impact of this funding on the addiction counseling workforce and share our vision for expanding these efforts across North Dakota.

Becoming an addiction counselor in North Dakota is a lengthy and rigorous process. In addition to earning a bachelor's or master's degree, most addiction counselors must complete between 350 and 960 supervised training hours at TAAP or one of the other five regional consortiums in the state. TAAP was established in 2015 as an apprenticeship model through the Heartview Foundation to provide accessible training opportunities for students where they live.

To address the growing addiction counselor workforce shortage in the state, TAAP received a grant from the opioid settlement committee. While workforce shortages exist across many industries, addiction counseling is unique in that when we effectively treat individuals with substance use disorders, they can return to their families, communities, and workplaces, helping to strengthen other industries as well. This investment in the addiction counseling workforce

has proven highly successful, exceeding the initial goals we presented to the committee.

With this funding, TAAP has made significant strides. First, we hired a full-time TAAP director—myself—fully dedicated to the administration and success of the program. In this role, I guide students through the process of becoming addiction counselors, answer their questions, advocate for them with the Board of Addiction Counselors, and help them navigate academic requirements. Having a dedicated point of contact has provided students with crucial support in what can often be a complex and overwhelming process.

Additionally, we have been able to provide a livable wage to 29 addiction counselor trainees. To put this into perspective, TAAP previously averaged only four trainees per year and had set a goal of 10 for this grant. The increased number of trainees has been made possible through strong partnerships with our training sites and the Heartview Foundation. Before this funding, the addiction counselor trainees had to complete six months (or 960 hours) of unpaid training. Due to the full-time nature of this requirement, many were unable to hold other jobs during this period, creating a financial barrier to entry into the profession.

TAAP has also received 27 scholarship applications from students in their junior and senior years of college. Of these, we awarded 15 scholarships ranging from \$1,700 to \$10,000. Each recipient signed an agreement to work as an addiction counselor in North Dakota for five years or repay the funding, ensuring that our state continues to benefit from this investment in workforce development.

Furthermore, TAAP has expanded its training sites from nine to 16, all of which are rigorously vetted to provide high-quality, research-based experiences for trainees. A significant portion of this expansion has occurred in rural areas, allowing students to train in their home communities with the goal of remaining there to serve local populations upon graduation.

Recognizing the critical role of clinical supervisors in the training process, we have also allocated funds to provide stipends to supervisors who take on trainees. Training new counselors is time-intensive and requires preparation, often taking time away from other responsibilities. Offering stipends has helped us recruit 19 additional clinical supervisors across the state. Additionally, TAAP has partnered with ND Department of Health and Human Services, CDC and UND's Center for

Rural Health to develop a free, 20-credit online CEU program for those pursuing clinical supervision status, further strengthening the training pipeline.

Beyond these immediate efforts, TAAP is committed to long-term workforce development through outreach initiatives. We have established a pipeline program to promote addiction counseling as a career choice by partnering with ND HOSA-Future Health Professionals, visiting high schools and colleges, and attending job fairs to engage students early in their career exploration.

I have included a document detailing TAAP's accomplishments with the OSF grant, including a map showing where our trainees live or plan to practice. We strongly encourage the Legislature to continue appropriating funding to the Opioid Settlement Committee, ensuring they have the resources to vet applications and support successful initiatives. Addressing the addiction counseling workforce shortage is not a one-time effort. Sustainable funding will allow us to continue building this workforce by engaging high school and college students, offering scholarships, and providing paid training opportunities. Additionally, we have proposed to the Department of Health and Human Services that TAAP be allowed to contract with other regional consortiums to extend paid training opportunities to students in the other consortiums.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the work TAAP is doing to address the addiction workforce shortage in North Dakota. I appreciate your commitment to tackling substance use in our state, and I am happy to stand for any questions.