



Testimony in Favor of HB 1012

House Appropriations – Human Resources Subdivision

February 5th, 2025

Chairman Nelson and members of the committee,

My name is Katie Jo Armbrust and I'm testifying in general support for all of HB 1012 on behalf of the North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People, albeit providing nuanced support. Yesterday you heard about the housing initiative, which came from the taskforce started under the previous administration and what has been included in the current administration's budget for the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS). I provide this information and the following as a summary of background and experiences from the organizations providing direct services and short-term housing assistance to people and families at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness across the state.

First, I'd like to comment that we agree with most of the information you were provided; we have known for a long time that the answer to homelessness is housing and services. We know that addressing the housing crisis takes more than just the development of affordable housing, it takes housing of all types and income levels. We know that it is the provision of housing and services that stabilize people, and that's what our providers have been doing for years. We adhere to evidence-based models, follow best practices with person-centered approaches, and do everything within our power to provide a hand up, not a handout.

While COVID funding for rental assistance was directed to DHHS for a variety of reasons, the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency (NDHFA) has been the primary administrator of homeless-related funding after the transition from the Department of Commerce to NDHFA during the last legislative session. NDHFA holds annual competitive grant rounds and subgrants funding out to local agencies throughout the state to provide direct assistance. Agencies use a database and coordinated-entry system that track and support the provision of both financial assistance and services.

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Despite the more than \$140 million in assistance provided by the DHHS RentHelp program with helping more than 20,000 households, there are many untold stories of peoples' experiences that were marred by delayed payments, inefficient communication with local landlords as well as providers. Unfortunately, today we're seeing the number of households experiencing homelessness increase.

The membership of NDCHP respectfully requests all homeless-related funding currently allocated to DHHS be redirected to the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency to ensure appropriate, effective and efficient use of funding. When we think about the provision of services and housing assistance, we look to the experience and strength of agencies who have a long history of doing so. NDHFA is experienced and knowledgeable in administering funding to local agencies to address local needs. Although DHHS had the difficult task of administering emergency funds under unprecedented times, when we consider long term solutions, NDCHP, as the representative of organizations doing this work every day, knows that the best way to administer funding is at the local level. Housing is a local issue; let's invest in the agencies doing this work boots on the ground, rather than at the state level.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Jo Armbrust". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K".

Katie Jo Armbrust

Lobbyist #1692

North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People