



Chairman Nelson and Members of the House Appropriation Committee.

I am Doug Wilson, the President of Integrated Telehealth Partners. We provide telebehavioral health services throughout North Dakota. We provide 24/7 Crisis Services in two hospital emergency departments, Park River and Northwood, and we are in contract discussions with several others. We provide outpatient telepsychiatry and teletherapy in 10 communities Bowman, Crosby, Dickinson, Garrison, Grafton, Lisbon, Northwood, Park River, Stanley, and we are onboarding services in Williston.

In October 2023, Integrated Telehealth Partners entered into an agreement with the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services to provide behavioral healthcare in the county jails, thanks to many of the representatives here today and this committee. We appreciate the opportunity to provide such valuable services in supporting the Sheriffs, Jailers, Corrections Staff, and most importantly those struggling with behavioral health conditions.

After signing the agreement with HHS, we estimated it would take 18 months to get buy-in and onboard every county jail. After making several onsite visits to each jail across the state and tremendous support from Pam Sagness, Shauna Eberhardt, each of the Resource Centers, and several HHS staff we were able to onboard all 18 jails in just 8 months. We are serving more than 150 inmates a month and feel there is an opportunity to help even more. We continue to have ongoing dialogue and periodical visits with each jail, the Resource Centers, and HHS. Next Thursday, I personally will be in Fargo meeting with the Southeast Resource Center and Cass County Jail to discuss how we can help streamline to the commitment process.

This year we are working to help jails with their suicide risk assessment processes. We understand some jails have effective evidence-based screening processes in place which we don't want to disrupt. However, several jails have come to us raising their hands and asking for assistance because they don't feel qualified to determine who should be on suicide watch and who is safe to come off suicide watch. We have collected materials to provide jail staff and are developing training videos to help train staff on evidence-based process. In addition, we are working to make substance use providers available to the jails since we are seeing a growing prevalence of substance use disorders among inmates.

We feel good about the rollout of our services to the jails, and I think you will agree in saying that it's been a success after hearing the letters of support that we've received.

2/4/2025

Honorable members of the legislature,

I want to highlight the critical role of telepsychiatry services in our jails, particularly in a state like North Dakota, where there is a notable shortage of healthcare providers in rural North Dakota, especially in specialties such as psychiatry care. Telepsychiatry has emerged as a transformative solution, bridging the gap between incarcerated individuals and the mental health care they desperately need.

Across our state, approximately 75% of inmates struggle with substance use disorders, often coupled with serious mental illnesses. The prevalence of these conditions in our jails is three to six times higher than in the general population. Without proper intervention, these individuals tend to remain incarcerated longer and face a greater risk of recidivism upon release. If we fail to provide essential mental health support, we will only perpetuate a cycle of incarceration and missed opportunities for rehabilitation.

Despite the dedicated efforts of our counties, the challenges remain daunting. Historically, 75% of inmates with serious mental illnesses will go untreated or await sentencing or will be released back into the community without care. Telepsychiatry services have provided a vital lifeline, ensuring that individuals receive necessary treatment, even in the most remote corners of our state. However, the demand for these services far exceeds the available resources, with provider shortages and increasing mental health needs compounding the issue.

The importance of telepsychiatry cannot be overstated. Without it, large numbers of individuals with mental illnesses will continue to cycle through our criminal justice system, leading to tragic outcomes and missed opportunities to improve both lives and public safety. It is our duty to expand and strengthen these services, ensuring that every inmate with a mental health condition has access to the care they need. Doing so can reduce recidivism, ease the burden on our small county correctional facilities, and create a safer and healthier future for our communities.

I urge you to fund and expand telepsychiatry services in our state's jails. This will help break the cycle and provide a path toward recovery and reintegration for those who need it most.

Bob Werlinger
Administrator, McKenzie County Jail
701-421-3675/701690-6480
rweringer@co.mckenzie.nd.us

2/4/2025

Mountrail County Correctional Center was part of a working group that included jail Administrators and Executive Director Sagness in partnership with ITP Telepsychiatry to implement Telepsychiatry in ND Jails that was funded through the biennium. Telepsychiatry has become a widely acceptable method for delivering psychiatric care. Studies have shown its effectiveness is equal to in-person psychiatric visits. ITP is providing an alternative to transporting inmates for psychiatric care and has the potential to decrease inmate waiting time to receive care. ND Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health Division (BHD), partnering with Integrated Telehealth Partners (ITP) began to offer our facility services in December of 2023.

ITP has provided psychiatric evaluations and medication management for inmates using telehealth technology. HHS paid ITP's administrative costs and provider costs associated with this service allowing it to be available to incarcerated individuals.

Jail staff, administrative staff and medical staff received training to establish an efficient process to exchange inmate medical records and deliver medication prescriptions to our local pharmacy. Mountrail County Correctional Center provided the hardware for web conferencing (typically a computer & webcam or Ipad) and a high-speed internet connection. ITP supplied the software needed.

Mountrail County Correctional Center found the following benefits just to name a few.

- Not limited to the services of the nearest mental health treatment center
- Safety and security of Doctor's and inmates by eliminating direct contact
- Improved access to mental health specialty care, especially in rural areas.
- Behavioral health care for better outcomes.
- Safe and secure environment for video calls.
- Increased access to specialists.
- Reduced costs; the Correctional Center paid for medications prescribed only
Eliminates transport times and costs to and from out of town providers
- Time optimization for staff
- Increased patient satisfaction; as most incarcerated individuals have never received mental health care prior to incarceration and those who did were unable to maintain that care for a variety of reasons.
- Ease of making appointments and follow-up appointments
- Continuity of care to quality providers upon release as our local medical center contracts with ITP as well

Overall, having ITP available to Mountrail County inmates has been a valuable addition to the services offered in the Correctional Center. ITP has given the Correctional Center the ability to

provide Inmates with timely services to mental health care with qualified medical professionals without a long wait time. Which has been immensely beneficial for the Inmates utilizing the service as they are able to address their mental health concerns, receive a diagnosis and treatment, including medication management, faster than the nearby providers and treatment centers are able to accommodate. This in turn provides a safer environment not only for Correctional Center staff but for the other Inmates housed within the facility.

Laurie Johnson, Administrator

Mountrail County Correctional Center

PO Box 155

Stanley, ND 58784

701-628-8900 Ext. 8501

701-628-5245 -Fax

2/4/2025

Dear Members of the Legislature,

I am writing on behalf of the Lake Region Correctional Facility in Devils Lake to express my strong support for increased funding for telepsychiatry services for county jails.

As you are well aware, our state is facing a critical shortage of behavioral health services. This shortage is further exacerbated by the challenges faced by incarcerated individuals, where access to treatment is often limited to the basic needs of safety, rather than comprehensive care. It is time to move beyond outdated practices and embrace a progressive approach that provides incarcerated individuals with the mental health services they need to foster rehabilitation and reduce the risk factors associated with recidivism.

Since February 2024, our facility has successfully utilized telepsychiatry services, specifically ITP, allowing inmates to receive timely and professional mental health support. These providers bring both empathy and expertise, offering education and treatment that many of our inmates have never previously had access to. Through these services, we have seen firsthand how telepsychiatry has provided a sense of hope and demonstrated that change is possible when individuals are given the proper support.

I urge you to consider expanding funding for telepsychiatry services so that incarcerated individuals across our state can continue to connect with healthcare professionals and receive the mental health care they urgently need and deserve.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Thank you,
Victoria Church
Behavioral Health Case Manager
Lake Region Law Enforcement Center
vchurch@lrlec.org
701-662-0745

My name is Joelle Schmuck, and I have been a public health nurse at Walsh County Health District as well as a correctional nurse at Walsh County Jail since 2021. Since implementing Integrated Telehealth Partners (ITP) in the spring of 2023, our jail has experienced a profound shift in psychiatric care access and outcomes. Before ITP, our inmates faced significant barriers to receiving timely and specialized mental health medication management. Transporting them to outside clinics was not only costly and logistically challenging but also delayed necessary care, often leaving primary care providers struggling to manage complex psychiatric cases beyond their expertise.

ITP made it possible to have direct access to psychiatric specialists through telehealth. Our inmates now receive prompt, high-quality medication management which ultimately leads to better treatment outcomes and a more dignified healthcare experience. Instead of enduring long waits or facing the added stigma of attending appointments in restraints and a jail uniform, they can now receive care in a setting that respects their privacy and dignity. Appointments are readily available, scheduling is seamless, and ITP's providers are professional, responsive, and committed to collaboration.

This partnership has saved our jail invaluable time and resources while significantly improving the mental health and well-being of our inmate population. ITP's services have been vital to the success of many inmates after release. I am incredibly grateful for the impact they have made, not only in Walsh County jail but across the entire state.

Sincerely,

Joelle Schmuck, BSN, RN



McLean County Sheriff's Dept.



P.O. Box 1108
709 6th Ave.
Washburn, ND 58557

Sheriff Jerry "JR" Kerzmann
Our Family Protecting Yours!

Phone: (701) 462-8103
Fax: (701) 462-3780

Dear Members of the Legislature,

I am writing on behalf of a small county jail that has been utilizing ITP resources over the past year. These services have truly been a game changer in how we approach and manage mental health issues within our facility.

Before this program, it was a constant struggle to access the appropriate mental health resources. However, the ease of access provided by ITP has significantly alleviated this challenge. As an administrator, the support we've received has helped not only reduce my frustrations but also directly improved the well-being of the individuals in our care.

In the course of the last year, I've witnessed firsthand the impact of these services—particularly in situations where individuals have previously exhibited violent or disruptive behavior, both verbal and physical. Once these individuals were connected with the mental health resources offered through ITP, I've seen a complete shift. They've been able to reach out for help, receive proper psychiatric care, including medication, and benefit from ongoing aftercare support.

The positive feedback from both staff and residents has been overwhelmingly supportive. The reduction in incidents, as well as the improvement in overall well-being, would not have been possible without these critical resources. I wholeheartedly support the continuation and expansion of ITP services, as they have proven to be invaluable to the safety and mental health of everyone in our facility.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
C. Howe
Captain


McLean County Sheriff's Office/Jail



In closing, I want to thank you Chairman Nelson and Members of the Committee for giving us the opportunity to provide care in your jails. I have genuinely enjoyed traveling across the state meeting with the Sheriff Departments and discussing ways for us to make behavioral healthcare more accessible. I am asking for your continued support for the services we are providing to we can continue to expand the number of individuals we serve and provide the care that so many need.

Thank you

Doug Wilson

President, Telehealth Services

P: [\(855\) 270-3625](tel:(855)270-3625)

M: 515-979-5460

E: doug.wilson@integratedtelehealth.com

www.integratedtelehealth.com

