

Subject: HB 1012

February 4, 2025

Dear House Appropriations,

I am writing as a parent, advocate, and board member of GiGi's Playhouse Fargo to share how critical the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Waiver is for families like mine in North Dakota.

My husband and I are parents to four children, two of whom have significant disabilities. Our 14-year-old son, Sam, has global developmental delay, autism, hydrocephalus, and other medical complexities. Our 9-year-old daughter, Claire, has Down syndrome. The DD Waiver has been a lifeline for our family, allowing us to access essential services that help our children thrive while ensuring we can maintain balance in our lives.

One of the most impactful supports the waiver provides is respite care. As a stay-at-home mom to two children with special needs, having access to respite allows me to step away from my full-time caregiving role and recharge. It gives my husband and me the opportunity to strengthen our marriage and spend quality time with our two neurotypical children—something that is often difficult to do when managing the daily challenges of special needs parenting.

The DD Waiver not only supports individual families but also strengthens our entire community. It allows children and adults with disabilities to receive care in their homes and communities rather than institutional settings, preserving family bonds and ensuring a higher quality of life. It helps parents remain in the workforce, reducing the financial strain on families and lessening the burden on state-funded services in the long run. By enabling individuals with disabilities to access the care they need while remaining engaged in their communities, the waiver fosters inclusion, dignity, and opportunity for all.

For parents like me, the future is a constant worry. As our children grow older, the need for consistent, high-quality support becomes even more critical. The uncertainty of what adulthood will look like for them keeps us up at night—wondering if they will have the care, resources, and opportunities they deserve. North Dakota must ensure that our state's program remains strong and fully funded, not only for the families who rely on it today but for the generations to come. We need to set ourselves apart from our neighbors to the east - Minnesota - a state long recognized for its incredible in-home care programs. If North Dakota wants to attract and retain families, we must invest in the services that allow individuals with disabilities to thrive in their homes and communities. Ensuring that our DD Waiver remains robust and forward-thinking is not just an investment in individual families - it's an investment in the future of our state.

I urge you to continue advocating for and protecting the DD Waiver so that families like mine - and many others across North Dakota - can continue to access these vital services. I would be

happy to share more about our experiences and how this program directly impacts the lives of those who rely on it.

One final thought - The proposed 1.5% increase in funding for disability services is simply not enough to meet the growing needs of individuals and families who rely on the DD Waiver. Rising costs, staffing shortages, and increased demand require a stronger commitment. I urge policymakers to re-evaluate this modest increase and instead approve a more meaningful 3% budget increase. This investment is essential to ensuring that families have access to the care and support they need, that providers can recruit and retain qualified staff, and that North Dakota remains a state that values and prioritizes its most vulnerable citizens. Ensuring that our DD Waiver remains robust and forward-thinking is not just an investment in individual families - it's an investment in the future of our state.

Thank you for your time and for considering the real-life impact of this essential program.

Thank you,
Trisha Stibbe
Proud Parent & Advocate
Board Member, GiGi's Playhouse Fargo