



Testimony prepared for the House Education Committee  
SB 2176 – North Dakota Children’s Cabinet  
Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director  
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Chair Heinert, and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Kim Jacobson. I am the Director for the Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone, which includes the counties of Traill and Steele. In addition, I currently serve as Vice-Chair of the North Dakota Children’s Cabinet. I am here today to provide testimony in support of SB 2176.

The North Dakota Children’s Cabinet was established during the 66<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly (SB 2313). As an inaugural member of the cabinet, I have served since the Cabinet’s first meeting in November 2019.

The Children’s Cabinet exists to assess, guide, and coordinate care for children across branches of state government and tribal nations. We monitor the needs and trends that arise within the system of children’s care services that are available in North Dakota. We also network with community partners to learn about service gaps, challenges, and innovations. Our fourteen members meet monthly to share insights and strategize comprehensive service delivery for the children in our state.

For several years, a key focus of our approach to continuous quality improvement has been the study of other Children’s Cabinet models in the United States. Learnings from other Cabinets helped us develop a charter and strategic plan, which was finalized in 2024. This is the roadmap that guides the vision, mission, and goals of the Children’s Cabinet.

Senate Bill 2176 plays a pivotal role in that roadmap. One of our findings has been that the most impactful Children’s Cabinets in the United States are located within their respective governor’s offices. This positioning lays the foundation for a multidisciplinary Cabinet that can learn from, and collaborate with, the executive branch of state government. By relocating our staffing and administrative services from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Office of the Governor, SB 2176 offers the North Dakota Children’s Cabinet that same stability.

Additionally, SB 2176 provides the critical addition of designated workgroups to support Cabinet efforts. This will allow for the focused study of assigned topics by a wider range of subject matter experts who can present their findings and recommendations to the Children's Cabinet. In fact, this legislative session has raised several topics that could benefit from focused workgroups overseen by the Children's Cabinet. Local stakeholders have diverse perspectives on the needs of children in our communities — and how to meet those needs. For example, HB 1562 strengthens local decision-making in the frequency of mandated reporter training. If passed, this bill will be easy to implement and allow school districts to streamline staff workload while staying current on child safety issues. On the other end of the spectrum, HB 1095 would substantially increase the role of government in North Dakota schools. More importantly, its narrow focus on the investigation of abuse and neglect may lead to missed service opportunities that local families need to thrive. Lynn Flieth, the Director of RSR Human Service Zone, explained it perfectly when she testified that “because Child Protection Service activities transcend any single entity, and rely upon a community response, the original intent of [House Bill 1095] may be more comprehensively and appropriately addressed in a coordinated effort through a statewide approach, perhaps through the Children's Cabinet. It would be beneficial to be inclusive of other service providers, law enforcement and the legal community along with the Child Protection system and schools to enhance understanding, strengthen systems, and to optimally support children and their families.” Senate Bill 2176 provides the Children's Cabinet — and overall, the state — with the opportunity to respond holistically to the complex needs across our state. Focused workgroups will give us the opportunity to incorporate the perspectives of experts who serve children in a variety of ways: as educators, as parents, as health service providers, and more. These groups will also provide the Cabinet with greater capacity to incorporate evidence-based outcomes into recommendations. As a result, Senate Bill 2176 will reduce systems conflict and increase the probability of positive outcomes for the children and families we serve.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 2176 opens new doors for the Children's Cabinet. It gives us greater opportunity to hear from multi-disciplinary workgroups and supports a strategy-driven, solution-oriented, and collaborative approach to meeting needs. These strategic changes set the stage for service delivery improvements, prudent investments, and overall improved care for North Dakota children.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I stand for questions from the committee.