

Testimony Prepared for the  
**House Finance and Taxation Committee**

February 12, 2025

By: Lynn Flieth, RSR Human Service Zone Director

RE: HB 1570—Relating creation of a tobacco tax distribution behavioral health fund, etc.

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Chair Headland and members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee, my name is Lynn Flieth. I'm the Director for the RSR Human Service Zone, which includes the counties of Ransom, Sargent and Richland. In addition, I'm a member of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1570.

Human Service Zones provide critical services for North Dakota communities. We administer economic assistance programs. We also deliver child welfare services, including child protection, foster care, in-home case management, as well as receive referrals for Children In Need of Services (or CHINS). Human Service Zones and regional Human Service Centers commonly provide services to citizens who have greatest needs and the least resources. Many of the clients we serve are living at or near poverty levels and frequently are struggling with behavioral health and substance use disorders.

Human Service Centers (HSC) provide behavioral health services throughout the state of North Dakota. Citizens with limited financial resources and/or no health insurance coverage rely upon HSC to receive necessary behavioral health and substance use services. There is a strong correlation between those experiencing behavioral health crises, substance use/abuse and addiction to tobacco/vaping and other related products. The National Institute of Health states: when examining "*the use of tobacco products (including e-cigarettes) among young adults, we find that the use of e-cigarettes in those with a mental health diagnosis is associated with greater odds of higher stress, depression, and substance use...*" Directing a portion of tobacco taxes collected to establish a fund supporting Human Service Centers in meeting behavioral health needs seems like a logical and natural decision.

On behalf of the Human Service Zone Directors, we urge a "do pass" on HB 1570 Thank you for your consideration. I stand for questions from the committee.