

Testimony
House Bill No.1072
House Human Services Committee
Representative Matthew Ruby, Chairman
January 13, 2025

Chairman Ruby, and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Kelsey Bless, Licensing Administrator with Children and Family Services under the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I appear before you in support of House Bill No.1072, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

As a leader in ND child welfare, it is important to have clarity in the century code, which governs our administrative code and policy. The Department proposed these changes to offer consistency and clarity for child welfare practitioners. I also want to note, as indicated in the fiscal note, that the changes proposed in House Bill No. 1072 will not affect the Department's budget.

Section 1:

The proposed changes in Section 1 of this Bill amend section 50-11-03.2 of the North Dakota Century Code regarding use of public funds. Page 1, lines 17 through 19 consists of two small clerical changes meant to enhance clarity of statutory authority as well as acknowledge the use of public funds, whether federal or state, for guardianship subsidy in our state. Guardianship is pursued as an alternative to foster care in circumstances where a family member or other suitable guardian is willing and able to accept responsibility for the care of the child. Guardianship subsidy is reimbursed to families by the use of federal funds; however, state general funds are an allowable option for children

who do not meet the federal guardianship eligibility guidelines. The proposed changes reflect current processes for guardianship subsidy.

Section 2:

The proposed changes in Section 2 of this Bill amends section 50-11-07 of the North Dakota Century Code to provide a specific timeframe in which the Department will review child welfare history for a prospective or current foster care provider. Page 2, lines 9 through 12 will authorize the Department to review any current or historical child welfare court involvement in the applicant or foster care provider's home. If the individual has or had their own child removed from the home and placed into foster care, the Department could deny the new licensing application or revoke the current license to provide foster care to children. The five-year specification proposed in this Bill reflects the timeframe required by the adoption home study, which will provide consistency for current foster care providers selected for adoption.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.