

Testimony
To the
Human Service Committee
on
HB 1337

Good afternoon, Chairman Ruby and members of the committee. My name is Allen Anderson and I'm the Director/Administrator for Walsh County Health District located in Grafton, North Dakota. I have been the director since 2021. Walsh County Health District has worked in conjunction with the Walsh County Commission and Agassiz Associates, PLLC to provide behavioral health services to the Walsh County Jail.

I am testifying in favor on HB1337.

When I first became the Public Health Administrator of Walsh County Health District, I was approached by our Sheriff about the complex issues surrounding people who find themselves jailed. He expressed to me that there was a great need to address the behavioral health needs of people being jailed because of the revolving door of people leaving jail and being arrested over and over again for the same issues. It was clear to both of us that the current model of incarceration was not an effective model of true rehabilitation.

In my other discussions with Walsh County Commissioners, it was clear that the Commission was ready to take action to address these problems. In late 2021, the Walsh County Commission voted to devote dollars to implement a comprehensive behavioral health treatment program for inmates in the Walsh County Jail. Agassiz Associates, PLLC in Grand Forks was subcontracted to carry out the services for a period of 3 years. Their team of licensed professionals were able to provide group therapy, individual counseling, and post-release services to jailed individuals. The funding has since run out, but the needs are still great.

As I've had discussions with other colleagues across North Dakota, I've realized that there are many gaps in addressing the mental health of inmates. If we'd like to see true rehabilitation of people, attention must be given to mental health on a much broader scale. HB1337 would provide the necessary funding to continue or initiate the provision of comprehensive behavioral health services across the entire State for those in jail.

I have brought several colleagues with me today that can answer any questions about the day-to-day operations of this program, but I'd also be happy to answer any general questions that I can.

Respectfully submitted,

Allen Anderson, Administrator
Walsh County Health District