

Dear Valued Committee Members,

My name is Kaci Sharp, and I am the WIC Director for Walsh County, Pembina County, and Langdon. I am writing for multiple reasons including: a concerned citizen, professional and advocate in support of HB 1337 to fund mental health and substance use disorder treatment in county jails.

Inmates lose private insurance and federal benefits such as Medicaid, Medicare, or VA benefits due to incarceration, and the way our current system is set up is not sustainable for county jails, and it is not treating the root cause of why inmates are there in the first place. Currently, county jails must fund treatment, which is financially unsustainable. There is very limited mental health therapy and substance use disorder treatment which is a huge gap in our current service and a major disservice to our citizens. Unfortunately existing programs only address part of the problem.

Being in favor of HB1337 to fund mental health and substance use disorder treatment in county jails would make a difference in so many lives, and Walsh County has been proving this to be true. It reduces recidivism by addressing the root causes of criminal behavior, improves correctional officers' safety by developing inmates' positive coping skills, helps public safety by fostering healthier reintegration into society, saves taxpayer money by reducing repeat incarcerations, and it strengthens communities by aiding individuals to overcome addiction, rejoin the workforce, and rebuild many family connections. I see this first hand in my position at WIC how the lack of support for mental health and substance disorder treatment is detrimental to families.

You, as committee members, have the power to make the beneficial difference in lives, and this is an urgent call to action to please support HB1337. I will gladly provide additional information or answer any questions as needed.

Thank you for your time and consideration to support HB1337 to fund mental health and substance use disorder treatment in county jails, a much needed opportunity for people.

Sincerely,
Kaci Sharp, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Certified Lactation Counselor
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