

Chair Ruby and Members of the Committee,

I write you today in SUPPORT of HB1337, a bill to expand mental health services in correctional facilities. This bill was developed by Rep. Anderson after the successful implementation of substance use disorder voucher reimbursed services in the Walsh County Correctional Center, and their successful pilot to expand those services to include mental health services via ARPA dollars. This bill capitalizes on a rare opportunity - private providers who are ready and eager to not just provide services, but to establish therapeutic environments in correctional facilities.

This program would enable correctional facilities across the state to invite private providers in to establish therapeutic relationships that can transfer beyond the facility. Establishing treatment early can better empower judges to make dispositions based on an individual's demonstrated progress and their ability to return to the community to continue services.

Over the past few legislative sessions, mental health and our prison capacity have been top priorities. Absent continuing efforts to reduce the unmet needs of people living with mental illness we run risk of increasing state expense to build and operate more prison beds. Bringing more private providers into the mix is a way we can continue to stretch our efforts to meet the need.

The need is well defined, since deinstitutionalization in the 1970s and 80s, a significant population of people living with mental illness are able to successfully live their lives outside of institutions, preserving their rights and reducing costs to the State. Unfortunately,

a smaller population of people living with mental illness have struggled to live successfully in the community and oftentimes end up in correctional facilities due to a lack of supports. Traditionally, county correctional facilities have been not a place of rehabilitation, but of detention, which can set individuals with mental illness back in their treatment and recovery efforts.

The Human Service Centers (HSC) have made progress in providing services in correctional facilities, with some HSCs sending providers to facilities or filling immediate needs via telehealth. Still, HSCs are challenged by staffing, resources, and geography. HSCs remain vital, but they cannot be the only solution to providing services in the correctional setting.

Thank you,

Michael Dulitz
Casselton, ND