

Testimony Prepared for the
House Human Services Committee

January 21, 2025

By: Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

RE: HB 1338: Military status in child abuse and neglect allegations

Chair Ruby, and members of the House Human Services Committee, my name is Kim Jacobson. I serve as the Director of Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone, which includes the counties of Traill and Steele. Additionally, I serve as President of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. I am here today to testify in support of HB 1338 with consideration of amendment.

Human Service Zones are the legal designee of the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) to perform an array of human service duties. This includes the intake, assessment, and determination of suspected child abuse and neglect reports. As a state supervised, locally administered system, there is a team of dedicated professionals, at both the Human Service Zone and NDHHS level that work together to deliver, supervise, and oversee child protective services (CPS). For your reference, I have included "Who Does What in Child Welfare?" information sheet. This tool includes a high-level overview of duties and responsibilities related to CPS. The starred items highlight North Dakota's CPS team.

Currently, there are memorandums of understanding in place between Human Service Zones that are located near military bases. This includes Grand Forks and Ward Human Service Zones. The memorandums outline similar expectations included in HB 1338 and already include notice to the Air Force family advocacy program when a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is identified as having affiliation with military members assigned to the installation. The existing agreements are more specific and clarify roles and expectations.

The North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association reviewed HB 1338. Questions arose regarding roles, intent, and scope of the proposed bill. For example, what

does the term “military status” include? Is the intent to include all branches of the military including Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, Space Force, and National Guard? Does this apply to active duty, reserve forces, and retired individuals? If this law is implemented, does a nearest military installation’s family advocacy program have authority to serve all military branches or are there different entities that should be notified? Does the family advocacy program have authority over spouses who are not enlisted but are alleged offenders, or subjects, living on or off an installation? What can our CPS teams expect of the military installation’s family advocacy program upon notification of the child abuse and neglect allegations? What is the military installation’s family advocacy program’s intended role? Would this change legal designee roles as detailed in the “Who Does What in Child Welfare” document?

Lastly, I offer consideration if the continuation of local memorandum of understandings between North Dakota-based military bases and bordering Human Service Zones would serve as a better option and more nimble process for serving military families than a statewide law. If a statewide law is desired, it could direct NDHHS to work with Human Service Zones and military family advocacy programs to develop mutually agreeable memorandums of understanding and processes so that statewide impact and training could be achieved.

To assist the committee in your discussion, I offer potential amendment to HB 1338:

Line 7: The department shall determine the military status of an individual at the initiation
Line 8: of a child abuse and neglect assessment. If the department determines an allegation of
Line 9: abuse or neglect involves a military-affiliated individual who is in active or reserve duty
Line 10: status, the department shall notify the nearest military installation’s family advocacy
Line 11: program of the allegation and assessment.
Line 12: The military installation shall maintain responsibility for reporting data to the federal
Line 13: Department of Defense.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony regarding House Bill 1338. I stand for questions from the committee.