

Testimony Prepared for the
The North Dakota House Judiciary Committee
House Bill 1034 Related to the Reestablishment of Parental Rights and Responsibilities
January 15, 2025
By: Desiree Sorenson, Mountrail McKenzie Human Service Zone Director

Chair Klemin, and members of the North Dakota House Judiciary Committee, my name is Desiree Sorenson. I am the Director for the Mountrail McKenzie Human Service Zone, which includes the counties of Mountrail and McKenzie. In addition, I serve as the Vice Chair of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. I am here today to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1034 relating to the reestablishment of parental rights and responsibilities.

Human Service Zones are mandated to provide child welfare services, including child protection services, foster care, and in home case management as well as receiving CHINS (Child in Need of Services) referrals and administer economic assistance programs for the state of North Dakota.

Consistent with NDCC 50-01.1-06 and NDCC 27-20, Human Service Zone Directors are given legal care, custody, and control over children in the public foster care system when a child's parental rights have been terminated by the court. Child Welfare Workers in the zones work diligently with adoption agencies and family members to plan for permanency options (such as adoption or legal guardianship) for children. However, for a variety of reasons at times permanency for a child cannot be achieved, leaving the child to linger in the state's foster care system. HHS invited other stakeholders, including the North Dakota Supreme Court, Human Service Zone Directors, and the ND Association of Counties to discuss this topic. Currently in North Dakota there are (12) children whose parents have had their parental rights terminated, have not been adopted, and have not been in a permanent home for 12 months or more.

HB 1034 would offer an alternative to providing permanence for children. While utilization of the provisions detailed in HB 1034 would happen under specialized and likely infrequent instances, it does offer to be a valuable tool in serving North Dakota youth and their families. Based on these reasons, I support HB 1034.

Thank you for your consideration. I stand for questions from the committee.