

March 16, 2025

Dear Chair Dever and Members of the Senate Appropriations Human Resources Committee,

My name is Debby Bolte, and I am writing in strong support of House Bill 1012, which provides essential funding for the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). As a grandmother, a former in-home support and respite care provider, and someone who has firsthand experience caring for a child with complex medical needs, I know how vital these services are—not just for the individuals receiving care, but also for the families who rely on them.

My grandson was born prematurely, spending several weeks in the NICU. Shortly after birth, our family learned that he has Down syndrome, as well as serious congenital heart defects—ventricular septal defect (VSD) and atrial septal defect (ASD)—which required open-heart surgery out of state as an infant. I accompanied him, my daughter and son-in-law to Rochester MN, Mayo Hospital for the surgery. His recovery was complicated by a blood clot, which my daughter and I discovered on the way home. This required him to be flown back for additional treatment, where I once again accompanied them.

Due to his **premature birth, congenital heart condition, and Down syndrome**, he was **not allowed to attend daycare and has required in-home support since birth**. For years, I was honored to be his **in-home support and respite care provider**, quitting my full-time employment and ensuring that he had consistent care while my daughter and son-in-law worked to provide for their family. Both are **small business owners** who contribute to North Dakota's economy by creating jobs and providing services in their community. Without in-home support, they **would not have been able to maintain their businesses or their ability to work**. **Without funding, I would not have been able to provide care for him. My husband took his life when my grandson was only 8 months old, leaving me the only income earner in my household. I could not have assisted my daughter without the state-funded support to provide income for me.**

I have witnessed firsthand how essential these **state-supported services are**—not just for children like my grandson, but for **the entire family unit**. Supports like **Early Intervention, therapy services, Medicaid-covered healthcare, and in-home care** have allowed my grandson to **grow, develop, and thrive**. They have also given my daughter and her husband the ability to continue working and contributing to our community without the constant worry of how they will manage their son's medical and developmental needs. It also allowed me to be the primary care provider at an essential time which I couldn't have afforded to do without an income.

Why These Supports Matter:

- **In-Home Supports and Respite Care:** When I served as my grandson's in-home caregiver, I saw firsthand how vital this support is. It ensures that children with significant needs receive **high-quality, personalized care** while allowing families to continue working. These services are **lifelines** for families across North Dakota.
- **Early Intervention:** The services my grandson received as an infant and toddler have **helped shape his development, communication, and independence**. Without continued funding for Early Intervention, children with disabilities may miss critical opportunities for growth.
- **Medicaid Providers (PT, OT, ST and Dental Care):** Medicaid ensures that my grandson receives the therapy and medical care he needs to build strength, coordination, communication and independence. Without this access, families could face excessive wait times or financial barriers to care.

Request for a 3% Increase Over the Biennium:

I strongly urge the committee to approve a 3% increase in funding for both years of the biennium. The **cost of care is rising**, and without appropriate funding, families could lose access to the services that allow them to care for their loved ones while continuing to work. By investing in these programs, you are supporting families, strengthening our workforce, and ensuring that children like my grandson receive the care they need to reach their full potential.

Thank you, Chair Dever and committee members, for your time and consideration of this important funding request. Your support will make a lasting impact on families across North Dakota.

Sincerely,
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