

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

My name is Tiffany Ormonde, and I am writing in support of House Bill 1012, which funds crucial services under the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). As both a respite care provider and an aunt to a child with significant medical and developmental needs, I have seen firsthand how these services impact families.

My nephew, now five years old, was born prematurely, spending seven weeks in the NICU. During that time, our family learned he has Down Syndrome and, after additional testing, that he was also born with serious congenital heart defects (VSD and ASD). He required open-heart surgery out of state as an infant, which was further complicated by a blood clot that forced an emergency return trip for additional treatment.

Because of his complex medical history, my nephew was unable to attend daycare and has required in-home support since birth. These services have made it possible for him to receive the specialized care, therapies, and assistance he needs to thrive. They have also allowed my sister and brother-in-law to continue working and running their businesses- contributing to North Dakota's economy while ensuring their son receives the care he requires.

Through state-funded support, my nephew also receives speech therapy, which has been instrumental in helping him develop communication skills. For children with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities, speech therapy is a necessity, not a luxury. It directly impacts their ability to communicate, express their needs, and participate in school, relationships, and daily life. Without reliable access to therapy, children may face setbacks that affect their long-term success.

Why these supports matter:

In-home supports and Respite Care: these services give families access to consistent, high-quality care for their loved ones while allowing parents to remain in the workforce. Without them, many families would be forced to choose between working and caregiving.

Speech Therapy and Early Intervention: My nephew's state-supported speech therapy services have been life-changing. Without funding for these services, children with developmental delays may struggle with communication, impacting their future independence and opportunities.

Medicaid Providers (PT, OT, and Dental Care): Ongoing physical and occupational therapy helps children like my nephew develop strength, mobility, and coordination.

Maintaining adequate provider reimbursements is essential to ensuring access to these services.

Request for a 3% Increase Over the Biennium:

I urge the committee to approve a 3% increase in funding for both years of the biennium. The cost of care continues to rise, and without sufficient funding, families may lose access to the resources they depend on. These supports are not optional; they are necessary for families like mine to provide the best possible future for their loved ones.

By investing in early intervention, in-home care, therapy services, and Medicaid provider reimbursements, you are supporting North Dakota families, working parents and the next generation of children with special needs. These programs do not just help individuals- they strengthen our communities and economy as a whole.

Thank you, Chair Dever and committee members, for your time and attention to this important issue. I appreciate your consideration of this funding request, and I hope you recognize the vital role these services play in the lives of North Dakota families.

Sincerely,
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