

Testimony
HB 1012
March 26, 2025

Chairman Dever and Members of the Committee

My name is Chaz Brobst. I am encouraging you to pass HB 1012. There are many pieces of HB 1012 that affect both my personal life and my professional life.

The behavioral health funding, especially mental health services, are things that I rely on to live my best life and to do my work to the best of my ability. My job requires me to be in a good place mentally. I have struggled with mental health issues for the past 20+ years. I have worked hard to get to the place I am now. Staying in a stable place is important for both my work life and my mental and physical health.

There are many pieces of this bill that are near and dear to my heart. As an individual who has dealt with serious mental illness for over half my life at this point, I know how important funding is for Behavioral Health. Things like 988, mobile crisis units, Peer Support, Behavioral Health Clinics and others. I know what it is like to have to go out of state for mental health care because services have not been offered in North Dakota. This should not be happening. If the Vision of Health and Human Services is really to be the healthiest state, then we need to be providing the funding to provide the services to do just that. Without this funding symptoms of mental illness will increase, and this would include suicide rates in our state. They are already too high. I have gotten lucky that none of my attempts have ended my life. For that I am grateful. I have been given the chance to provide testimony asking you to continue to fund these programs. To some it may be dollar signs, to others it is more time. More time to spend with a loved one. More time for doing the things they enjoy. It is another day on earth. Without funding for behavioral health, lives will be cut short because they cannot receive the care they need in a reasonable amount of time. Until someone has been to that very dark hole you don't know just how long a five-minute hold while trying to access critical mental health care really is. Or how long a month wait is to see a counselor, until every breath seems like an eternity and breathing seems too difficult to do.

In my early 20's, I was hospitalized for the first time at the State Hospital. Since then, I have been hospitalized multiple times at the State Hospital with my last stay about two years ago. Not only is there the stigma of just hearing that you will be admitted to the State Hospital, there is also the condition and feel of being in the State Hospital. The current condition of the State Hospital does not provide a healing environment. A new State Hospital is in the best interest of the state and the people it serves.

For the past six years, I have also been dealing with significant physical health issues. As someone who not only struggles with my mental health but also deals with a lot of medical issues, having a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) approach would be very beneficial to me and many North Dakotans. These CCBHCs focus on all parts of a person. They take a holistic approach and see the whole person. Having professionals know how much medical issues affect a person's mental health and how mental health issues can show up in

physical symptoms is something that needs to be addressed. Having a whole person approach will help with both medical and behavioral health costs. Treating physical health issues will help so that chronic pain, misdiagnosis, and life-threatening illness does not severely impact mental health. Treating mental health issues will help prevent some of the physical symptoms of mental health such as anxiety attacks, unexplained pain, increase of heart rate, and nausea among many others. The CCBHC's will also provide me appropriate community-based care so that I don't have to be unnecessarily admitted to the higher level of care at the State Hospital.

Peer Support is evidence-based practice and is something that should be used on a regular basis. Youth and new clients just coming into the mental health system have a better and quicker chance of recovery if they have someone to guide and answer questions as they navigate an often-confusing system. Even for individuals that have been struggling with mental illness for a long time and navigating the system benefit from peer support by having a story of hope. Peer Support Specialists show that recovery is possible.

Funding organizations such Mental Health America of North Dakota (MHAND) and Consumer Family Network (CFN) is important as MHAND provides a place to help with the navigation of the system and the entire process. CFN provides a safe network for individuals to find hope among their peers. Organizations like North Dakota Federation of Families for Children with Mental Health (NDFFCMH) focuses on getting kids and youth help early enough so they have a better chance at leading productive, healthy adult lives. When kids and youth get the help they need early in life the risk of legal charges lessens. This helps keep youth and adults both to stay out of jail helping with an already crowded system. The Department of Justice (DOJ) is not only already crowded but struggles with funding. Treating and keeping people out of the Justice System helps create stronger and better funded communities.

As I said in the beginning, HB 1012 affects both my personal and professional life. I work in the Developmental Disability (DD) field. Not only does that require me to be in a good, stable place, mentally to do my job effectively. I am also able see how individuals with disabilities face constant hurdles in their lives. A person with a disability is not less than any other person. They deserve to be treated with the same respect and dignity any other person is treated with.

The North Dakota State Council on Developmental Disabilities (NDSCDD) focuses on making North Dakota a place that people with a disability wants to and can live comfortably. NDSCDD works to make positive changes for ALL people to live a safe, happy life.

Focusing on Autism Services and continuing to fund the Autism Waiver (without the decrease of funding) is important for each person with Autism to live their best life. By having the funding available, and having the staff available, to treat and teach someone to cope with their Autism so they can be productive adults and do amazing things. I have people with Autism in my life and they are public speakers, they are graphic designers, they positively make an impact on society. Everyone with Autism or any disability deserves that chance.

Programs like Family Voices, Special Education, Early Intervention, Designer Genes and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Services each plays an important role in helping children, youth, young adults and adults create a life that is important to them. In my recovery I was taught the phrase

“Build a Life Worth Living”. That phrase applies to every person. All people, disability or not, neurotypical or neurodivergent, every person deserves a chance to “Build a Life Worth Living”. It is up to us, as people in the DD field, to create those opportunities. It is up to you, the Legislatures, to provide the funding for us to make that happen.

In conclusion, I am asking that you support HB 1012, without any cuts. By providing the needed Behavioral Health funding for things like CCBHCs, and Peer Support you are giving people back their lives that was taken away due to Mental Illness. When you support services for those with Disabilities, like the DD Council, Autism Waiver and others you are helping create opportunities for people that, not that long ago weren't given a chance to succeed. We cannot be taking that chance away now. Together, let's help “Build a Life Worth Living” for each person in North Dakota. Let's create and live up to our vision of being the healthiest state.

Thank you for your time today.

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