

Senate Appropriations Committee

Senator Brad Bekkedahl, Chair

March 26, 2025



Testimony of: Kate Coughlin Executive Director | Nexus-PATH Family Healing

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Responding to House Bill 1012

Chair Bekkedahl and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. My name is Kate Coughlin, Executive Director Nexus-PATH Family Healing.

Our nation’s leading pediatric health experts have declared the children’s behavioral health crisis so dire that it warrants a national emergency. In 2021, over 35% of North Dakota high school students – grades 9-12 – reported feeling persistent sadness or hopelessness and nearly 1 in 5 reported seriously considering dying by suicide within the past 12-months (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021), equating to approximately 6,818 youth across the state. The challenges of recent years have only increased the need for timely access to high-quality mental health services.

Failure to ensure that mental health services are available when and where people need them has dire consequences for individuals, families and communities throughout North Dakota. In the current system, only four counties have the mental health resources their population requires. Only if you live in one of these more densely populated counties can adequate services be found.

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As the Executive Director of a children’s mental health care provider that works closely with the state of North Dakota’s Division of Behavioral Health and Children and Family Services to ensure youth in North Dakota have access to mental health care in their home state, I implore you to ensure that budgetary restrictions do not impact services provided to children and families.

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North Dakota’s state agencies have worked tirelessly to partner with non-profit entities – such as Nexus-PATH Family Healing – to institute cutting edge services such as Treatment Foster Care. This service allows young people to be able to access treatment services for mental and behavioral health needs in home-based settings with licensed providers committed to their ongoing work towards wellness. These services occur in communities across our state and strive to reunify children with their natural supports. These services – provided by Nexus-PATH Family Healing – require mental health professionals leading teams of providers to ensure the highest quality of service in the least restrictive environment. Reducing funding to Children and Family Services would negatively impact our ability to continue to grow Treatment Foster Care across North Dakota.

Nexus-PATH Family Healing also supports youth who are in the foster care system through the Chafee grant program. This program is focused on the development of independent living skills for any young person who has been in foster care. This program supports young people in pursuing further education, provides case management and helps young people develop skills that will help them launch into adulthood.

Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Nexus-PATH Family Healing appreciates the opportunity to provide this information to the 69th North Dakota Legislative Assembly. In his recent State-of-the-State address, Governor Kelly Armstrong shared the passion of his grandmother – Myrt Armstrong – who was an early champion of providing mental health services. As she said, ““In this kind of work we are constantly risking it all, constantly setting out in uncharted waters. Even in brief moments of victory, we know we cannot rest, because the pain of those for whom we struggle – our fuel and our focus – is always there with us.” Those words ring as loud today as they did when she spoke them over four decades ago. At Nexus-PATH Family Healing, we strive every day to turn words like these into action, to better the lives of youth across our great state.

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Please feel free to reach out to me anytime, should you have any questions or need additional information as you protect funds to address children’s mental health challenges.