

Dear Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2096. My name is Sarah Dixon-Hackey and I am a 25 year resident of North Dakota. As a mental health advocate and someone who has personally navigated the challenges of our behavioral health system, I strongly believe that continued growth and expansion of our services are needed in a manner that effectively meets the needs of all North Dakotans.

In order to accomplish this we must pursue decentralization of our behavioral health services so that individuals and families may receive care within their own communities. Research has shown that community-based behavioral health services are valuable because they often lead to greater success rates in treatment by providing accessible care, allowing for better engagement with patients and a stronger connection to local support systems that can lead to better mental health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs.

In 2018 and 2020 two separate studies were conducted to assess our state's behavioral health services. In both studies recommendations were made to limit monetary investments to the State Hospital and expend greater effort and resources into establishing community-based services. It is now 2025 – seven years after implementation of this process to improve our system. During these seven years the people of North Dakota have continued to struggle with their mental health – have continued to see numbers increase in mental health challenges and suicide rates – all with the existing centralized system. It is time for us to stop doing what no longer works and to make a change. It is time for us to begin the work of bringing behavioral health services directly to communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.