

Testimony
Senate Bill No.2096
Senate Appropriations-Human Resources Division
Senator Dick Dever, Chairman

Chairman Dever, and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Human Resources Division, I am Pamela Sagness with the Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health Division. I appear today in opposition to Senate Bill No. 2096.

Since 2014 North Dakota has been working to expand and enhance behavioral health services in North Dakota. This work has included multiple legislative studies that have resulted in clear actionable recommendations and efforts. During the 21-22 Interim, the Acute Psychiatric Treatment Services Committee commissioned a study on hospital and residential beds in North Dakota.

The Acute Psychiatric and Residential Care *Final Report* was published April 28, 2021. The first recommendation was to build a modern and efficient state hospital.

The report states, "This should not come as a surprise, North Dakota needs a modern state hospital. The deterioration of the existing campus, mounting deferred maintenance, inefficient use of space, shared prison foods and intimidating barbed wire all around are just a few of the many reasons a new hospital is warranted. North Dakota needs a facility dedicated to its citizens that specializes in court-mandated, forensic care and persons with complex needs unable to be cared for in the private sector and their local community."

Last session the legislature appropriated \$12,500,000 for the design of a new state hospital (2023 SB2012 Section 21). Governor Armstrong's Executive Budget request includes \$300,000,000 to build the new state hospital.

North Dakota has also expanded behavioral health services for community-based services. New programs like Free Through Recovery, Community Connect, the Substance Use Disorder Voucher, Permanent Supportive Housing, Recovery Housing Assistance Program, the Certified Community Behavioral Health (CCBHC) initiative and many other efforts have shown the state's commitment to community-based services. An effective behavioral health system requires all levels of care.

Last session the legislature appropriated funds to the Department for Williston and Dickinson regions. The goal was to work with a private hospital to build 10 bed behavioral health inpatient services in all regions of the state. This funding demonstrates the already existing efforts to ensure individuals can access inpatient services in their home region. The Department is currently in contract for the 10 beds in Williston but there was no interest to develop this service in Dickinson with the appropriated funds.

Lastly, I've met with most of the hospitals in North Dakota and many of their psychiatric leads, they clearly identify support for the new state hospital as we serve a population the private sector does not and they do not plan to serve in the future.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.