

Senate Human Services Committee

Chair Senator Judy Lee

January 8, 2025



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

kcoughlin@nexuspath.org | Direct: (218) 979-0180

Responding to the Children's Behavioral Health Crisis: Support for Senate Bill 2079

Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services 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 is 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.

The current definition of Mental Health Professional reduces the availability of Mental Health Professionals and reduces access to needed services. The amendment to this definition as found in SB 2079 has the potential to improve the availability of mental health professionals and create an accessible system for mental health in North Dakota.

Nexus-PATH supports the modification to the definition of mental health professional as proposed in SB 2079 and supports the passage of this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this critical issue affecting the state of North Dakota. We ask for a "DO PASS" recommendation on SB 2079.