

Testimony
Senate Bill No.2081
Human Services Committee
Senator Lee Chairman
January 8, 2025

Chairman Lee, and members of the Human Services Committee, I am Pamela Sagness with the Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health Division. I appear before you in support of Senate Bill No. 2081, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

The proposed changes in this Bill amend 50-24.4-29 regarding geropsychiatric facilities to align the language to current process. Current language requires the North Dakota State Hospital to have performed an evaluation of the individual being admitted to a geropsychiatric facility. Removing this language allows for avoidance of unnecessary evaluations by the North Dakota State Hospital. The proposed process aligns to improved patient care as an individual may transfer directly if already evaluated by another provider.

On lines 16-17 the Department requests to remove the language that prohibits the North Dakota State Hospital from offering "geropsychiatric services through a unit set up exclusively to provide these services". Although not currently planned, removing this section allows the Department to be responsive to future needs if there is not adequate service available in the private sector.

Earlier this week we met with the Long Term Care Association and would like to offer an amendment to clarify that admissions from the North Dakota State Hospital will be given first priority but that the Department does not generally oversee admission.

In 2024, 15.86% of North Dakotans were age 65 and over. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 6 individuals in the world will be age 60 and over, forecasting a significant increase in need for long-term care options to adequately care for the aging population. Approximately 14.6% of the older population has a mental health condition. Due to additional medical conditions related with aging and additional risk factors, geropsychiatric facilities are a necessary component in the continuum of care to adequately serve this population.

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