

Senate Human Services

SB 2112

January 13, 2025

My name is Julianne Horntvedt, and I am the Executive Director of the North Dakota State Council on Developmental Disabilities. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of our Advocacy Committee. We feel 2112 is a bill that seeks to address broader service needs but, in doing so, threatens to set a dangerous precedent for the future of services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

While we understand the intent of SB 2112, which seeks to expand service options, we are deeply concerned that this bill could lead to unintended and harmful consequences for individuals who rely on the Life Skills and Transition Center (LSTC). LSTC plays a vital role in providing specialized care for individuals with developmental disabilities who require high levels of support. However, it is critical that our focus shift toward reducing reliance on institutional settings like LSTC and instead invest in community-based alternatives that promote independence, inclusion, and dignity.

LSTC exists to serve individuals with complex needs who require specialized, 24-hour care. While it provides a critical safety net for some, over-reliance on this institutional model not only isolates individuals from their communities but can also hinder their long-term well-being and development. We urge the state to prioritize the expansion of community-based services that offer tailored, integrated, and compassionate support. This approach not only meets individuals' needs more effectively, but it also aligns with best practices in mental health care and supports the long-term goals of independence and community inclusion.

The North Dakota State Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that individuals with developmental disabilities thrive best when they are supported within their communities. Overusing LSTC as a catch-all solution for vulnerable populations undermines this principle. By investing in community-based services, we can provide support that is both personalized and empowering, rather than relying on institutional solutions that may not meet individuals' needs in the most appropriate way.

Expanding LSTC's scope to include individuals who do not meet its current eligibility criteria poses significant risks. It could overwhelm the Center's resources and compromise the quality of care for its current residents—those who depend on its stability, consistency, and specialized expertise. Diverting resources to serve a broader population could ultimately leave these individuals underserved and vulnerable, undermining LSTC's core mission of providing life-changing care for those who need it most.

We are particularly concerned about proposals to extend LSTC services to minors facing mental health challenges. While these needs are pressing and deserve attention, we strongly believe that LSTC is not equipped to provide the specialized, community-based care that minors require. Institutionalizing minors in a setting that is not specifically designed to meet their developmental and mental health needs can have long-term negative effects. Instead, we advocate for a system that prioritizes community-based mental health programs, offering integrated care and support that is more appropriate and effective for minors.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the legislature to reconsider SB 2112 in its current form and focus on building a robust network of community-based services that promote independence, inclusion, and dignity for individuals with developmental disabilities. The future of care for vulnerable populations lies in supporting them within their communities, not in expanding reliance on institutional settings like LSTC. Thank you for your time and consideration.