

Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 2192
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Judy Lee, Chair
January 20, 2025

Good morning, my name is Scott Burtsfield, and I am the Executive Director for the Vocational Training Center, a licensed service provider for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, located in Fargo, North Dakota.

I first wish to thank Chairman Lee and fellow members of the Senate Human Services Committee for the opportunity to speak to you about Senate Bill 2192. We are in full support and appreciate this bill which is designed to offset the financial burden of accreditation costs that have been shifted to providers licensed to deliver disability services in the state of North Dakota.

As a service provider in ND, we are mandated to undergo the accreditation processes as a requirement for licensing. The Council for Quality and Leadership, or CQL, has historically been the accrediting body contracted by the state of North Dakota. CQL is focused on ensuring supported individuals are living meaningful and fulfilling lives, are part of the community, and that the organization provides quality, person-centered services for people supported.

The costs of this accreditation vary depending on the size of the organization's DD budget. For an example of the cost...this past spring my organization spent approximately \$25,000.00 on this process. These costs do not even include the hours and hours of employee time as well as food, meeting rooms and other associated expenses and resources required to complete the accreditation. It does, however, include the \$2,000.00 for our 18 month, 30 minute "check-in" phone call.

Until fairly recently, NDHHS would cover the costs of this process. Unfortunately, during the 2021 ND legislative session, unbeknownst to the state's providers at the time, the Department of Health and Human Services shifted all associated costs of the accreditation process to the service providers. This created an incredible and unexpected burden for many.

Thankfully, the department acknowledged this burden and provided assistance for some during the transition period. However, after July 1, 2023, DD providers were required to pay all fees associated with the accreditation process as funding and spending authority were not included in the North Dakota Health and Human Services' 2023-25 appropriation.

This past spring CQL announced a change in strategy for their accreditation process. In a clear money-grab, they stated they will now begin accrediting all services provided by a participating organization. This new approach applies to every service an organization provides – even those well outside the DD field. For providers delivering additional, ancillary programs and services not associated with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities, this would substantially increase the costs of accreditation.

As a result, NDDHHS has researched and suggested a few alternative accreditation bodies for providers to contact. In doing our comparisons we have found that, while we will finally have a choice of accrediting agencies, the recommended bodies still carry an exorbitant cost, doing nothing to eliminate the burden placed on providers.

As many of you already know, the state's providers of I/DD programs spend close to, if not well over, 80% of their budget directly on salaries and benefits for Direct Service Professionals (DSP), and rightfully so. Our DSPs are undeniably invaluable as the core personnel providing direct care services for North Dakota's most vulnerable citizens.

Though troublesome for all, shifting the cost burden to providers has placed an extreme hardship on various small providers who are already barely surviving paycheck to paycheck. For those organizations, choices must be made between necessary resources and finding or allocating monies to ensure accreditation has been completed.

Chairman Lee, members of the Senate Human Services committee, I respectfully implore you to pass Senate Bill 2192 and provide an appropriation to the NDDHHS to offset the burdensome and excessive costs placed on providers to meet accreditation standards as required by the department as a condition of licensing.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter and for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

I am available to answer any questions you may have.