

Testimony
Health and Human Services Committee
Tuesday March 23, 2010

Chairman Weisz and members of the Health and Human Services Committee- my name is Beverly Mathiason. I am the Director of Rolette County Social Services. The Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation is within the boundaries of Rolette County.

I was asked to talk about collaboration efforts between tribes and county offices. There are many programs that are available to residents of the county; I would like to provide some examples of the collaboration efforts involved in the administration of those programs:

Rolette County administers the **TANF** program, which is a cash assistance program. However, it is only available to single parent families or families with a disabled parent. I estimate that approximately 90% of our TANF caseload is Native American. The Bureau of Indian Affairs operates a General Assistance program for Native American households. Their program is also a cash assistance program, but they only serve single individuals and intact families. They will not assist families who meet TANF criteria. They will often refer a family to the TANF program; likewise, our staff will refer clients to their program.

TANF clients are required to be in an approved work or training activity; clients are referred to the **JOBS** program for this service. The Department of Human Services has contracted with the Tribal Employment and Training program to provide JOBS services to some of our TANF clients. The department also has a memorandum of understanding with another Tribal program, called TRIBAL NEW, to provide JOBS services for other TANF clients. Although the contract and MOU are between the state and the tribe, the county again must have a high level of communication and coordination with these tribal programs to ensure the clients are referred to the appropriate agency and that there is follow up and compliance on the part of those clients.

The county also administers the **SNAP** program (previously known as the Food Stamp Program). I estimate that approximately 80% of our SNAP caseload is Native American. The tribe also administers a food program in Rolette County, which is called the commodity program. Clients may choose to receive benefits from either program. The commodity program will serve anyone living on the reservation or tribal land, or any Native American family living anywhere in the county. We frequently communicate with the tribal program to avoid duplication of benefits.

Both the county and the tribe operate **Child Care** programs; families can apply at either office, although the tribe can only serve Native American households. Again, a high level of communication is needed to avoid duplication of benefits.

Both the county and tribe also operate fuel assistance (**LIHEAP**) programs; the tribe determines the population they wish to serve: the tribal program serves all enrolled members of the Turtle Mountain Tribe who live within the boundary of the reservation, as well as those living on tribal trust land. All other residents apply at the county office.

We often receive referrals from the Indian Health Service if they believe a person may qualify for North Dakota **Medicaid**. My colleagues at Indian Health Service tell me that their funding is very inadequate to serve the large numbers of clients needing services.

The **Home and Community Based Service (HCBS)** Program currently serves approximately 116 individuals in Rolette County, with approximately 85% of those clients being Native American. The program reimburses QSP's to provide services to those clients, and about 80% of those QSP's are Native American.

Rolette County sends a staff person once a week to an **outreach site** in the town of Dunseith, which is located on the far western edge of the county. There are many Native American households living in the Dunseith area who utilize the office to apply for benefits, recertify or to drop off paperwork.

Another area I was asked to address is the referral process for **child abuse and neglect reports**. When our office receives a report of child abuse or neglect, our first step is to determine where the child lives. If the child lives on the reservation, we forward the referral to the tribal child welfare program. However, there are times when jurisdiction is not clear; for instance, we recently had a report of abuse where the parents had joint custody of the child; one parent lived on the reservation and the other lived off. After consultation with the state's attorney and juvenile court authorities, the referral was made to the agency that could best protect the child.

The question was asked about the involvement of the tribes in the **budgeting process**. The proposed budget is published each year and a public hearing is held to gather comments before the county commission finalizes it. Rolette County is a poor county; we have ended the last two years with deficits of over \$100,00 per year. The social service budget supports a large staff to administer mandated programs, as well as our share of the various program costs, such as foster care, medical assistance, and SPED. We are understaffed, but it is a fact of life for a county with so little tax revenue.

I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to share this information with you. I would be happy to answer your questions.