

Testimony on HB 1012

2021 Legislative Session

January 26, 2021

Representative Chairman Nelson, Representative Vice-Chairman Kreidt and Members of the House Human Services Appropriations Committee:

My name is Vicki Peterson, and I am here to testify to restore the \$100,000.00 that has been eliminated in the budget for the Department of Human Services flow-through dollars. I am a Family Consultant for Family Voices of ND. I have been a Family Consultant for nearly 18 years. I first gained knowledge of Family Voices of ND through my son's Early Intervention Experienced Parent, (also a vital program that is having funding eliminated). My son, Aaron has Autism with an Intellectual Disability and chronic health conditions. At the time, my son was non-verbal but did not have a diagnosis yet, and our insurance was denying speech therapy. I was angry, how could they deny a child who was non-verbal, speech therapy. I spoke with Donene, the director of Family Voices of ND, she guided me to the resources I needed, and I got two bonuses, the first was help with insurance covering speech therapy and I had a connection to another parent who also had a child with an intellectual disability and turned out as well a diagnosis of autism which my son soon received. This started my path to help other families as well and I was immensely proud when I was asked to be a part of this most wonderful family, Family Voices of ND. Over these years I know I have helped many families just as I was helped.

Family Voices of ND is the Family-to-Family Health Information Center in ND. We navigate all systems of care, including those families who have children and youth with special health care needs, chronic health conditions and disabilities. All systems of care mean physical health, mental and behavioral health, navigation of health programs and insurance both private and public. We offer a unique component, lived experience. All staff has a unique connection to other families who have children with special needs as we all have children with special needs, or young adults now with special needs. This is essential for making those connections, not only with families but providers as well.

I would like to briefly describe what a referral to Family Voices of ND and specifically to me may look like.

- Referrals come from providers, schools, lead agencies, could be anywhere that had connections to families that have children and youth with special needs.

- I contact the family within 72 hrs. of receiving the referral and I pride myself that I stick to that rule, as families many times are connected to us when the family may be experiencing some crisis.
- I first need to listen to the issue, or crisis, and need. It is extremely important that the family knows I understand that I too have had some of the same experiences.
- There may be financial issues, they may need resources to find programs that will be of support to their child, they may need and most often do, emotional support, the need to speak with another parent that has some same experiences, maybe they lost health insurance, maybe there are family members with mental health issues and might need referrals to programs, maybe a child's school plan is not working and need support. Many times, they need multiple resources to, multiple programs, the care coordination and navigation of systems, many systems.
- Average calls are around 35 to 45 minutes. I must make sure to follow-up and follow-through for families, as they are counting on the support.
- Typically, there will be referrals to programs and or other resources, often there are many referrals and research as well to make sure we are looking for all resources.
- A call may come from a provider who already has a family on a case load but does not know how to connect them to informal or other formal supports.
- We are not a 1 call and done. I have families I have and continue to help navigate systems of care for over many years, as their child becomes a teenager, and teenager becomes a young adult.
- I am there to listen, I am there to navigate, I am there to support.

Family Voices of ND helps train many family members to become strong advocates for their children, a voice. We help families with positive communication with the providers. We help providers communicate with families.

You will hear many times throughout this session, about Person- Centered Planning, keeping children and youth from being institutionalized, more focus on home and community-based services, juvenile justice reform, family-centered care. Family Voices of ND is a part of this, we are all about family-centered care. We focus on the family with children with special needs. Wrap-around services must be in place for the families. If the family is not healthy, the child will not be healthy.

Being a part of Family Voices of ND, has changed my life. It has made me a better communicator and better person. I have opportunities to make a difference in the lives of families with children and youth with disabilities and chronic health, because

someone made that difference for me and my family. Family Voices of ND is reaching out to the 1 in 5 children in ND that have those special needs.

I am requesting to restore the monies that were cut from the Department of Human Services so that we can continue to do what we need to for those families that need us the most, the more vulnerable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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