

Dear Chairman Nelson and committee members,

My name is Emma Quinn and I am testifying on behalf of my support for a new state hospital. I am a mother, a wife, a community member, and I work with addiction and mental health on a daily basis as a care coordinator with Free Through Recovery, but most importantly I live with a serious mental illness. Mental illness does not discriminate, it is your brothers and sisters, your neighbors, or even your colleagues here at the state capital that struggle. When we talk about a new state hospital we talk about more than just a building that costs money to operate. We are talking about a beacon of hope in someone's darkest days. Living with a serious mental illness means I am not guaranteed good days. I have to fight every day to have control over my thoughts and behaviors.

I have had the privilege of being in a meeting with Dr. Rosalie Etherington where she explained the financial saving a new hospital would bring. The old building is outdated and falling apart. It would cost more money to bring the old building up to date than to build a new building. As a patient of the behavioral health system I deserve at bare minimum a working and functioning building to receive services in. This is not currently the case in Jamestown.

I have traveled the state trying to get a better picture of our behavioral health care systems in North Dakota. The one constant thing I hear is that we need beds in the western part of the state. Right now if you live in Dickinson or Williston you are traveling to Bismarck or Minot to receive services. In a state with such harsh winters this is irresponsible. The new state hospital would contract hospital beds in Dickinson which would help bridge the gap in services and help keep people in their communities.

In our hour long meeting Dr. Etherington talked about the long dark hallways that our current state hospital is composed of. When the state hospital was built we were still institutionalizing people. We have since learned that these approaches are actually worse for people's mental health. People need therapeutic environments to get better and to get back to their communities. Dr. Etherington talked about the new state hospital having windows to allow sunlight. This may sound like a small thing for most but as someone that has been put in windowless rooms due to her mental illness this is a big thing for me. My depression keeps me hidden away from the outside world in itself, please stop hiding people with mental illness' away in the current state hospital. Despite my struggles with mental health I deserve to be treated as a human. If you were to spend the night in the hospital you would expect to be treated in a therapeutic environment with dignity and respect. Just because I am seeking services for my mental health does not mean I do not deserve the same.

I ask for your support on building a new hospital not just because it will save the state money long term but because I and everyone else like me deserves a place to go get help that is not falling down. We deserve a safe and therapeutic environment to receive services. We will always need a state hospital in North Dakota due to our lack of providers. A new hospital will help stabilize people when they are in crisis and help connect them with the services in their communities. We have the ability to change how we provide behavioral health services in North Dakota and I ask that you be a part of that change.