

HB 1243 Faith Based Mental Health initiative

Testimony of Representative Marvin E. Nelson, District 9

House Human Services 1/19/2021

Chairman Weisz,

Mental health including addictions is a serious problem in North Dakota today. One of the great difficulties is we really don't have a lot of providers; access is especially poor in the rural areas. What we do have for counselors are pastors, ministers, priests. These highly trained professionals are present throughout North Dakota, they interact with and counsel their flocks on a variety of things. Probably the most common thing we think of them counseling is on family relationships or marital counseling.

That said, every day they deal with people who are suffering from mental health problems. Their training does not in most cases include a lot of education directly in things like mental health or addictions.

The idea is to improve their knowledge. Now it's not thinking of turning them into a counselor on the same level as someone with years of specialization. It's giving them basic tools and one of the very important tools is understanding what is available to people. Things like telehealth.

Improving their knowledge will have an effect on what people in their parishes know.

I believe this can be done at low cost and yet have a significant effect on mental health in ND. Rural areas especially really need things to get going and it is going to take a long time to get enough mental health workers in place. Let's use what we have, strengthen what we have.

The whole idea is to use our Office of Faith Based Initiatives in OMB to have a mental health, faith based initiative to meet a great need of the people of ND.