

**HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
JANUARY 20, 2021**

**TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 1264
Cathy Ferderer, Family Mediation Program Administrator
Office of the State Court Administrator**

Good afternoon, Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Service Committee. My name is Cathy Ferderer. I am the Family Mediation Program Administrator for the State Court Administrator's Office. I have been asked to present information on behalf of the Joint Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee (ADR) because the members who had planned to testify were unable to do so. The ADR committee was established in 2001 under Supreme Court Administrative Rule 43 for the purpose of studying alternative dispute methods and making recommendations for improving ADR programs in this state. The committee has six members and is staffed by the executive director of the State Bar Association. I am not a member of the committee but do attend their meetings to provide information about ADR as requested.

Senate Bill 1264 amends N.D.C.C. Chapter 14-09.2 regarding the work of parenting coordinators. For parents in high conflict over post-judgment parenting issues, parenting coordinators provided an option to avoid further court proceedings. Their purpose is to resolve parenting disputes by interpreting, clarifying, and addressing circumstances not specifically addressed by an existing court order.

The ADR Committee, has proposed the following changes to improve the work of parenting coordinators in North Dakota. The first is to expand the role. Currently, parenting coordinators are limited to assisting parents to address parenting time issues only. HB 1264 would expand the role of a parenting coordinator by allowing them to address all

disputes pertaining to parenting. Examples could include decisions regarding school activities, healthcare, transporting the children, and so on.

The second change would allow the parenting coordinator to communicate with the court on a limited basis. Currently, parenting coordinators are not permitted to have any contact with the court. The proposed change to the statute would allow the parenting coordinator to file the parenting coordinator's written decision with the court when there are ongoing disputes. This would provide judges with the specific details of the arrangements that were in place when the dispute arose so they can better understand the nature of the conflict and the efforts that have been made to resolve it.

Thank you for allowing me to present this information today and will stand for questions.