

Testimony
House Bill 1223 - Department of Human Services
House Judiciary Committee
Representative Klemin, Chairman

January 25, 2021

Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee, I am James Knopik, behavioral health administrator, with the Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division (Department). I appear today to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1223.

Alcohol is still the most used substance among North Dakota youth. 22.5 percent of North Dakota middle school students report having used alcohol at some point in their life and 27.6 percent of North Dakota high school students report current alcohol use (within the past 30 days of the survey) according to the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Since 2014 there has been a multi-branch effort to address gaps in the state's behavioral health system. The three key focuses are to support a full continuum of services (prevention to recovery), increase access to community-based services, and to reduce criminal justice involvement for those with behavioral health needs. Criminalizing behavioral health conditions can lead to unnecessary growth in the criminal justice system and harm to the individual and family.

Research supports the use of evidence-based education classes when individuals have experienced an alcohol related offense. These evidence-based educational classes can be provided for youth who experience an alcohol related offense creating a supportive and preventative response, rather than a punitive one. In turn, decreasing the need for more costly interventions later in life.

In summary the Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division supports House Bill 1223. This concludes my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions.