

Testimony Prepared for the
House Judiciary Committee

January 26, 2021

By: Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

**RE: House Bill 1427 – Duties related to the Commission on Juvenile Justice,
Children’s Cabinet, and Planning Committee for Children in Need of Service
(CHINS)**

Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee, my name is Kim Jacobson. I am the Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director, encompassing the service area of Traill and Steele Counties, and a member of the North Dakota Social Service Director Association. In addition, I am an appointed member of the North Dakota Children’s Cabinet serving as a community representative. Please consider my testimony in support of HB 1427 with proposed amendment.

Earlier today, the House Judiciary Committee heard testimony related to HB 1035 which would modernize and make significant changes to the North Dakota Juvenile Court Act. I support the recommended changes proposed in HB 1035 with the amendment to delay implementation. The delay is necessary as to ensure the service response critical for successfully meet the needs of North Dakota children and their families is in place. Additional time will also allow enhanced opportunity for the intent of law called for in HB 1035 to be upheld along with accountability metrics to be developed.

As a Human Service Zone Director, I am the legal custodian of 19 children in foster care. There is a currently shortfall of services to meet current needs. However, there are many opportunities on the horizon that will likely help expand services. For example, the services that will be possible through the 1915i waiver appear very promising. However, we just are not there yet. As a Human Service Zone Director, I am keenly aware that the local human service

zone system will likely see an increase of the families we serve with the changes called for in HB 1035. To best serve children and families, these changes are needed. I strongly believe that many of the children in the current unruly system would be better served in a strength-based, family-centric system and response that is provided within the human service zone system. However, again we need time and guidance to prepare, develop services, develop policy, and be ready to serve our citizens in this expanded capacity.

As a member of the North Dakota Children's Cabinet, I am also keenly aware of the systems bottlenecks, gaps, and changes in federal requirements. We need to work together to improve and redesign the way systems and programs work to best meet the needs of children and their families. The scope of work proposed for the planning committee focusing on improvements to the continuum of care, cooperation and collaboration between agencies and systems, policies and processes, metrics to track and report, and studying how best to address shelter care is greatly needed. Upon passage of this bill, I look forward to collaborative with the planning committee through my role of the Children's Cabinet and as Human Service Zone Director to help bring forth positive change and a more modern, responsive child welfare delivery system for North Dakota.

I do offer one additional amendment for the committee to consider. Upon reviewing the proposed amendment, I noted one omission. I offer suggestion to further amend by striking "commission on juvenile justice" on Page 2, Line 29 and replacing with "children's cabinet." This change will align the supervision of the CHINS planning committee with the children's cabinet which is consistent with the intent of the other proposed amendment.

This concludes my testimony on HB 1427. I stand for questions from the committee.

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