



House Appropriation SB 2012 March 8, 2023

Rep. Nelson and committee members. I am Kirsten Dvorak, Executive Director of the Arc of North Dakota; we have six chapters throughout the state of North Dakota that advocate on behalf of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) for full inclusion in their community of choice.

All people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) have the right to full lives in communities of their choosing where they can live, learn, work, and enjoy life. To achieve this, people with IDD need access to comprehensive, person-centered, and self-directed high-quality long-term support and services (LTSS). Robust, reliable, and immediately accessible funding sources, including Medicaid, are needed. There must be a flexible public policy framework that emphasizes self-direction, is well-funded, responsive, and nimble, and is developed with—and not for—people with IDD.

The lack of a proper system of comprehensive community Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) is a crisis that urgently needs resolution. Individuals and families need help to access the necessary resources and services to meet their needs while also facing a complicated and ever-changing patchwork of systems. We must work together to ensure everyone can access the community-based LTSS they need. We must also focus on making these systems more comprehensive, coordinated, and easy to navigate so that individuals and families can get the help they need.

The average daily rate to support an individual at Life Skills and Transition Center (LSTC) is \$1,231 per person or \$449,315 per year, and in 2017, the daily rate was \$916 per person, \$334,340 per year, that's a 34% increase in just six years. The Arc of ND understands the specialized need of LSTC. However, the state needs to support individuals in their communities of choice. Unfortunately, inadequate DSP compensation is a significant barrier to recruiting and retaining direct support professionals, putting individuals at risk of losing community services. Families should not be used as a substitute for those services as they may not have the resources to care for their individuals with complex and profound needs.

This is a critical issue since insufficient funding for livable wages and appropriate training for DSPs and their supervisors impacts the quality of support for people with IDD and their ability to live the lives they desire in their communities. We must strive for better compensation and resources for DSPs and their supervisors to ensure that people with IDD have access to the quality of life they deserve.

“Disability only becomes a tragedy when society fails to provide the things we need to live our lives” – Judith Heumann.

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