

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee.

My name is Hamida Dakane, I am a representative from District 10 in South Fargo.

House Bill 1468 was introduced on behalf of constituents.

Today I am speaking in favor of expanded funding for mental health through the bill before you.

During last summer and fall I was able to talk with thousands of residents of district 10, and one issue that came up time and time again was mental health. They asked all of us to help improve the state of mental healthcare in North Dakota. The people of North Dakota are recognizing that good mental health is vital to a good life, and that the care is either too expensive, too difficult to access because of availability, and often it is stigmatized as well.

While I was talking to voters, I noticed something surprising. They were all quite different people by any metric. Different ages, genders, races, religions. However, the stories were the same. North Dakotans are struggling with mental health issues of their own, of members of their family, or members of their community. Mental health isn't something we're born with the ability to fully manage on our own. We can handle some of it some of the time, and we can handle more when our parents and communities guide our development as good citizens. However, for most people there will come a time, or times when that just isn't enough.

Mental health is vitally important from birth to death. Young children need to learn to manage their emotions and thoughts so that they can function among friends, in classrooms, and around adults and authority figures.

Older children need to learn how to manage their focus so that they can learn increasingly difficult concepts in school and excel at sports and other extracurricular activities.

Older teens and young adults need to understand how to relate to potential romantic partners, co-workers, and bosses.

Active-duty military and veterans need to be able to manage the effects of difficult experiences and sometimes the impacts of physical injuries from their service, and we all need to learn how to manage the impacts of traumatic events in our lives. Children dealing with the impacts of divorce or tensions between adults in their

lives, and adults dealing with the impacts of negative feelings and impacts from their lives from childhood to adulthood.

Finally, for the people and families who struggle with mental health issues, they need to work through all the normal challenges of life with one more thing making it harder. Whether that's a small issue like the weight of a feather, or a huge issue like carrying hundreds of pounds on your back everywhere you go.

Our work here can help reduce the stigma around improving and seeking help to improve mental health. This is vitally important. How does one become a good man, a good woman, or a good citizen without strong mental health? It is impossible. The bill before you will ensure that awareness, access, availability, and affordability are also not a concern.

Besides helping our fellow citizens manage their health in a way that will make them stronger and better members of our communities, this bill will also help communities and individuals learn about the warning signs associated with very disruptive mental health issues. The tragic stories we hear all too often in our communities, stories of people harming their families, their communities, or themselves. We have the power to ensure that mental health is not a barrier for our fellow citizens. Not a barrier to being a strong community member, not a barrier to being a great family member, and not a barrier to being a successful provider for ourselves and our families.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I would answer any questions that I can. Thank you.