

Mark Heinert

Assistant Executive Director, Youthworks

Testimony in support of SB 2379

House Human Services Committee

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Chairman Weisz and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mark Heinert, and I am here today to provide information on SB 2379. I have been a licensed social worker in North Dakota for 30 years, serving runaway and homeless youth for the last 24 years. I am the Assistant Executive Director at Youthworks, a private, non-profit, youth serving agency serving Runaway and Homeless Youth in North Dakota. I am also part of the Missouri Valley Coalition for Homeless People, Inc.

SB 2379 would eliminate barriers to homeless youth's success by allowing the birth certificates of unaccompanied homeless youth to be provided to a homeless youth provider. Homeless youth and parents often need basic vital documents like a birth certificate to access employment, education, health, housing, and other needed services. The current process to get a birth certificate leads to a catch-22: people need a birth certificate to get an ID, and an ID to get a birth certificate. This challenge is one of the most common barriers that Youthworks sees young people experience that prevents them from

obtaining their goals. SB 2379 will eliminate this problem while adequately protecting against identity theft.

SB 2379 also makes sure that youth who are no longer staying with their parents can access their birth certificates. Youthworks serves over 100 youth each year who are runaway or homeless and are under the age of 18. Currently, ND law allows vital records to be issued to individuals who are at least sixteen years old. SB 2379 would ensure this is not a barrier for youth under 16 who need a birth certificate to get a job or access education, housing, or other services. Better access to birth certificates will help homeless youth access basic services and benefits, keeping them safer and healthier, which will empower them to access education and employment that can end their homelessness.

This bill was the result of listening sessions with homeless youth across the state of North Dakota. They have shared what have been barriers to their success, and SB 2379 would help reduce those barriers.