

Dale Wolf  
District 21-02  
Senate Bill NO. 2166

My name is Dale Wolf and I am the founding pastor of Lighthouse Church in downtown Fargo. The Lighthouse is a recovery-based ministry that strives to provide a place of love, encouragement, hope and recovery for anyone seeking help. The Lighthouse is a large and diverse Recovery Community Organization. We have also worked with the state of North Dakota to provide services for Free Through Recovery, Community Connect, and most recently Medicaid billable 1915i services. We have been honored to serve in these programs as a faith-based organization and one that is involved in the day to day, difficult and often messy work in what is a growing and evolving metropolitan community.

A number of us have already provided testimony to the Senate Human Services Committee, including individuals who have personally benefited from these services. I know you already have this testimony, so it is not my intention to duplicate what has already been provided to you.

Today I would like to offer a word of challenge to you, the appropriations committee, but also to the entire legislature. I am a person in long term recovery. My personal struggles have led me to start the Lighthouse. Recovery principles have not only shaped my life, but today it serves as the foundation of our Lighthouse ministry. I've been a pastor my whole adult life, but have largely been shielded from the world I now live in. In my work I now walk with people experiencing the depths of despair and powerlessness over addictions to substances. I now work in the world of chronic homelessness, generational poverty, and life controlling mental health issues. I am witness to the barriers that stand before men and women who desire to change their life and I see the day-to-day struggle to simply survive. Frankly, I had no idea.

But the Lighthouse has become a beacon of light and hope for so many people. Every week I witness miracles. The first apartment for a person in their 40's. A year of sobriety for someone after decades of substance abuse. A mom who has turned her life around and is reunited with her children and is working to support them. After years of incarceration, a real job, and the embracing of

responsibilities that at one time were avoided. A man with severe social anxiety and the complexity of issues that accompany it, now making friends and wondering if this is what it means to be happy.

I don't believe the government can do what we do at the Lighthouse. But you can help organizations like the Lighthouse do what we do best. From a faith-based perspective, we are the hands and feet of Jesus. From a more secular standpoint, we are using our lived experience to help others who need our help. We are not trying to make a profit. We are not doing anything extravagant. We just try and help people who come to our community organization or choose to work with us in the various state programs we work with.

My assessment of what the state of North Dakota has done in creating the programs we work with is ingenious. They are fairly inexpensive programs compared to the cost of incarcerating individuals, frequent hospitalizations, or fostering people's kids. Instead, we are helping people not only become stable members of society, but tax paying, contributing members of society. We are helping to raise the standard of life for many of the least of these in our community.

The challenge is that to do it well costs money. Small organizations like the Lighthouse, who are on the front lines of this work, are often unprepared to administratively tackle the requirements and expectations as providers of these government programs. That is especially true of Medicaid billable 1915i. This has been a steep learning curve for us. We jumped in to provide services with great hope and optimism. But there have been numerous challenges. Reimbursement rates and referral numbers have not been adequate to sustain an organization like the Lighthouse in this important work. My concern, if not us, then who will be able to provide these services?

My understanding is that the bill before you seeks to use Covid disaster funds for grants to meet some of the behavioral health needs that have multiplied many times over in just these last years. Changes in behavioral health services and the emergence of the programs we are working with have moved more and more individuals facing serious issues out into the community and into places like the Lighthouse. In my last testimony I detailed some of the ways we would use these

funds to help the people of our community and state. My plea is that you help us in this important work.

My experience in creating Lighthouse is that the best work amongst those we serve, is done by men and women who have lived experience and are now using their own recovery and experience to help others. I believe that the Lighthouse is still the only organization providing peer support services for 1915i. We are doing so, though the reimbursement rates are not adequate to cover the cost of providing these services. In order to continue, we will need assistance. In order for other providers to get involved, changes will need to occur. 1915i, like Free Through Recovery and Community Connect, is built upon the need for high quality peer support services.

I would like you to meet one such peer support specialist. Can I introduce Claire Bullis from our Lighthouse staff.