

Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Service Department,

My name is Kerry (Karolyn) Leno. I provide Care Coordination at Lighthouse Church of Fargo for Free Through Recovery, Community Connect, and I am the Lead 1915i Care Coordinator. I want to give a written testimony in favor of Senate Bill 2166.

I have been in this line of work for roughly eight years. I worked in the Peer Support Specialist role for many years and then transitioned into Care Coordination. I am in sustained recovery from addiction and various mental health disorders myself. Working in this field has allowed me to help those struggling and enriched my recovery journey.

When I first came into recovery, there were no programs such as Free Through Recovery, Community Connect, and now Medicaid billable 1915i. These programs have changed how people view addiction and mental health, opened doors for people who in the past would not have these vital supports, and created communities that focus on solutions rather than turning away from those that struggle, which is why assuring that these programs, especially 1915i, due to the complexity, has a solid foundation for organizations like Lighthouse Church, which had never billed for services before under Medicaid or worked in a program as complex as this. In addition, these funds can help smaller organizations obtain the needed training, administrative support, and quality assurance, which does take time and funding to employ those skilled people and open up many more opportunities to expand the 1915i services for the people we serve.

Another essential piece to why I am in favor of Senate Bill 2166 is that in the state of North Dakota, we have many enrolled providers to provide 1915i, however, those that are actually providing the services are very limited, which creates many barriers to providing care coordination to participants that are receiving services under 1915i. We are only as good as our resources, and our resources are limited. More specifically, Peer Support Services is very limited under 1915i. Having another means of support, financial support, could aid Lighthouse Church in expanding our services, especially Peer Support, throughout our community. Peer support is the key piece in all three state programs. It will also allow other organizations to expand their 1915i services, which is sorely needed. All but one of my participants have asked for a Peer Support Specialist under 1915i. Currently, we do not have a Peer Support Specialist at other organizations to refer to that can go into the community and provide the services that Peer Support does. This funding will change that. Moving forward with Senate Bill 2166 will give the push needed to open more doors for the people we serve.

Thank you for taking the time to review my written testimony in favor of Senate Bill 2166.

This concludes my testimony.