Senate Judiciary Committee
Testimony In Support of Senate Bill #2067
1-4-23

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Christal Halseth. I am the Executive Director of the Northern Plains Children's Advocacy Center in Minot, ND. I am here today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 2067.

As a nonprofit organization, our center relies heavily upon grants and donations to maintain services. Receiving payment for forensic interviews conducted at the end of the biennium creates hardship in our organization's ability to successfully develop an annual budget. It is, in many ways, a guessing game as to what we will get paid after providing the service over a two-year period. Most of our grants are on a reimbursement basis, and we are paid these reimbursements monthly. We can plan how to utilize those grants depending upon the needs of our center. However, in terms of reimbursements from the Attorney General's Office, we are significantly challenged due to the 24-month period we must wait to be reimbursed, and the amount of reimbursement is not known.

Our center operates using a line of credit, which we utilize due to relying on reimbursements. We must provide the services before we receive funding. To pay our expenses, mostly consisting of salaries, we often borrow against the line of credit when needed. Waiting 24 months for reimbursement for forensic interviews increases the amount borrowed against our line of credit which then accrues higher costs in interest to our center. Funding used to pay these costs would be better utilized in maintaining services.

Being able to bill for forensic interviews on a timelier basis will strengthen our budgets, by allowing us to make more practical decisions in expending our funding and eliminating the guessing game. Our budgets, over time, will become more stable, and we will be able to plan accordingly in terms of fundraising and grant writing.

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today and I will be happy to answer any of your questions.