

HB 1570 Testimony
House Finance and Tax Committee
Representative Headland, Chairman
February 12, 2025

Chairman Headland and members of the committee, my name is Matthew McCleary. I am the Deputy Director for both North Dakota Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (NDFFCMH) and Mental Health America of North Dakota (MHAND). NDFFCMH is a parent run organization focused on the needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders and their families. MHAND's mission is to promote mental health through education, advocacy, understanding and access to quality care for all individuals.

We are here to support HB 1570. North Dakota is in the midst of a mental health systems crisis, a crisis that the state of North Dakota has spent the better part of the last decade ending. Since the release of the HSRI Report of 2018, North Dakota began to implement recommendations in that study. Recommendations from the HSRI report do require significant financial resources to implement, but they are necessary. While much progress has been made in behavioral health services, much remains to be done--particularly regarding mental health services. For instance, targeted funding for substance use disorders is available through the substance use voucher however, there are no similar funds targeting mental health.

Who are the North Dakotans that use tobacco or related products? They are likely to be individuals that have mental health conditions. Over one third of people who smoke cigarettes have a mental health condition, and they account for 38% of all adult cigarette consumption. People with mental illness have shorter life expectancies, with health-

related impacts from smoking (and suicide) reducing their lives by as much as ten years. North Dakotans with mental health challenges are also not able to access mental health services in sufficient quantity or as soon as they need it. In short: people with mental health conditions are one of the biggest consumers of cigarettes and nicotine products, but are simultaneously having trouble getting access to mental health care in North Dakota. Raising the tobacco tax can prevent people with mental illnesses from becoming addicted to nicotine and can help them quit smoking. HB 1570 importantly directs funds raised from tobacco taxes into North Dakota mental health services, so that we can help end the North Dakota mental health crisis.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to respond to any questions.

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