

House Human Services Committee

Testimony on Senate Bill 2029

Representative Matthew Ruby – Chairman

March 10th, 2025

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee, my name is Donna Byzewski and I am the Program Director of the corporate guardianship program for individuals with intellectual disabilities at Catholic Charities North Dakota. I oppose Senate Bill 2029 in its current form.

For more than 37 years, the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Division of the ND Department of Health and Human Services has contracted with Catholic Charities ND to provide corporate guardianship services on behalf of adults with intellectual disabilities. The contract is very specific. We can only accept referrals from Developmental Disabilities Program Managers from the human service centers. There must be no other appropriate alternative such as family or friends who could serve as guardian. We are the guardian of last resort. The contract also specifies that we cannot refuse to serve a referral because of where that person might live – our services must be available statewide. There are critical times when a person may need the services of a guardian, and if no one else is available or appropriate, a corporate guardianship is a necessity.

For thirty-five of the 37 years, I have been with the corporate guardianship program and I have worked closely with the DD Division. At no time has the working relationship between the DD Division and corporate guardianship created a conflict of interest. The role of the DD Division and the role of corporate guardianship are separate and distinct. The contract lays out our role within the scope of service of the contract as well as expectations that we have policies and procedures, guardianship workers who have a certain educational background and skill set, insurance, etc. Through the contract, we have provided quality, person-centered services for individuals with intellectual disabilities for 37 years.

The corporate guardianship program provides a very efficient, cost-effective and state-wide service. The process is streamlined with almost all of our resources being dedicated to the direct provision of guardianship services. We are a frugal program that takes very seriously that we be good stewards of the funds that we receive from the legislature through the contract. Thank you for the opportunity to stand before you today and I would be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.