

Testimony
Engrossed Senate Bill No. 2112
House Human Services Committee
Representative Matthew Ruby, Chairman
March 18, 2025

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Heather Jenkins, the Superintendent of the Life Skills and Transition Center with the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I appear before you in support of Engrossed Senate Bill No. 2112, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Engrossed House Bill No. 2112. This bill addresses a population of youth that most facilities are unable, unwilling, or ill-equipped to serve—youth who require intensive stabilization services due to significant behavioral, developmental, or psychiatric needs.

The Life Skills & Transition Center (LSTC) Youth Transition Program is uniquely positioned to provide these essential services. Unlike many facilities, LSTC does not issue unplanned discharges, ensuring that youth are not left without support when no other provider will accept them. Many psychiatric and residential treatment facilities have toured LSTC and have acknowledged that our environment is significantly less restrictive than their own, despite the complex needs of the youth we serve. Furthermore, LSTC has a proven history of serving youth in tribal custody and those who are tribal members. These individuals, like all youth in crisis, deserve access to quality stabilization services that can help them transition successfully into their chosen communities.

LSTC's Youth Transition Program: A Bridge to Stability and Independence

The Youth Transition Program at LSTC is dedicated to supporting youth in crisis who require stabilization and structured support. The program serves as a vital bridge, equipping youth with the necessary skills to reintegrate successfully into their communities and lead more independent, fulfilling lives.

Core Goals of the Youth Transition Program

- Empowerment – Provide youth with the skills they need to achieve the highest level of independence possible, tailored to their unique abilities.
- Support & Stability – Foster a structured, nurturing environment that builds rapport, instills motivation, and reinforces the belief that they can achieve their goals.
- Successful Transition – Establish a replicable routine that supports a smooth transition into community life, ensuring long-term stability.

LSTC utilizes a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to provide comprehensive support to youth. A dedicated team works alongside each individual to create a structured 24-hour schedule that includes essential skill-building activities, opportunities to develop social skills, community engagement experiences.

Youth live in a home-like setting, with a twelve-person residence that includes private bedrooms and shared living spaces. The residence is divided into three suites, each with four rooms and a common area, balancing privacy with opportunities for social interaction.

When assigning youth to living areas, age, gender, risk factors, and abilities are carefully considered to ensure the most appropriate

environment. Each youth receives a Risk Management Assessment Plan, which identifies and addresses potential challenges in:

- Activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, eating, toileting),
- Behavioral health (self-harm, aggression toward others, elopement, inappropriate sexual behavior),
- Medical needs (breathing, mobility, medication considerations) and
- Community integration (school, activities, socialization).

This proactive risk management ensures the safety, well-being, and success of every youth in the program.

LSTC collaborates with a wide range of partners, including local school districts, other human services teams (Developmental Disabilities, Child & Family Services, Behavioral Health), service providers, families, custodians and guardians.

These partnerships have been instrumental in successfully transitioning 12 youth back into their communities within the past three years. This success underscores the effectiveness of LSTC's model in stabilizing and preparing youth for reintegration.

Safety is a top priority at LSTC. The program continuously assesses and adjusts its services to meet the evolving needs of the youth we serve. Unlike other providers that may refuse to admit or make decisions to discharge youth prematurely, LSTC remains committed to providing long-term, stable support through all of the ups and downs that characterize periods of instability.

While we join others in wishing that no young person would ever find themselves in crisis, we know that is not realistic. Given the need for stable and specialized solutions for youth who are in crisis, the LSTC Youth Transition Program can serve as a comprehensive, effective and temporary solution. The work the team does stands as a testament to the state's commitment to providing the best possible care to youth in need, even within the constraints of available resources.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.