

Senator Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 1567. I have worked in the Human Services field for over twenty years specifically with individuals with developmental disabilities. My biggest concern regarding healthcare for this population is specifically in the field of dental care. There are very few dental offices in the state that accept Medicaid. Thus, leaving many individuals having to travel two hours or more one way each time a dental visit is necessary. It also takes a significant amount of time to get into a dentist due to so few accepting Medicaid.

Individuals with disabilities often have significant dental needs and these needs are often untreated. In fact, as early as 1979 the National Conference on Dental Care for Handicapped Americans reported that the number one unmet health need for this population was adequate dental care.

According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (2009), although accessible dental care is essential for the general population, it is particularly important for people with disabilities due to the additional health concerns they face, as certain health conditions may make it difficult to maintain good oral hygiene, yet poor oral health may make it harder for an individual to manage—or could exacerbate—other health conditions. For instance, individuals with epilepsy may suffer from increased tooth trauma occurring during a seizure and many children with autism grind their teeth for self-stimulation or may take medications that worsen oral health. Oral problems such as gingivitis and periodontal disease have been shown to make it more difficult to manage blood glucose—critical for patients with diabetes—and problems such as muscular abnormalities or oral malformations can make it difficult to maintain a nutritional diet and good oral hygiene.

I think the study that is proposed is essential to be able to realize the problem that greatly impacts individuals with developmental disabilities but also low-income children as well as Native American children. I also think it is crucial that there is an exploration into solutions to the problem at hand and by reviewing the bill it seems the study is aimed at doing this as well. Again, I am in support of HB 1567, and I think this look into lack of dental care is long overdue.

Sargianna Wutzke

Bismarck ND