



**HB 1567 - Senate Human Services Committee  
Tuesday, March 18, 2025**

Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Kendra Vander Wal and I am the Executive Director for Designer Genes of ND, Inc. Designer Genes' mission is to support individuals with Down syndrome and those who support them to earn, learn, and belong across our state. At Designer Genes we estimate that there are over 270 individuals with Down syndrome living in North Dakota.

I appreciate the opportunity to share on the need for a comprehensive study of dental and oral health care access for individuals with disabilities. The Department of Health and Human Services tracks oral health data for North Dakota, and the findings are concerning. Results showed North Dakota has only 52 dentists per 100,000 residents, compared to 61 nationally. In addition, testimony by Sarah Aker, our North Dakota Medical Services Director, indicated that our state ranks 47th in the nation for this outcome measure for children on Medicaid, even though the dental payment rate for oral evaluations for children is 11th in the nation. Moreover, a March 2022 report from the National Council on Disability highlighted the ongoing lack of dental providers willing to accept Medicaid. Given that Medicaid is a common insurance source for many individuals with Down syndrome in our state, this shortage is challenging to our community. Although North Dakota includes Medicaid dental benefits as an optional State Plan, our dentist-to-patient ratio remains significantly lower than the national average.

The study will provide an understanding to barriers to accessing complex dental services, explore solutions to reimbursement rates, analyze consequences of unmet dental needs which includes health and financial burdens, learn more about obstacles to dental enrollment in Medicaid, and enhance provider education to name a few.

In closing, I encourage you to move forward with support of HB 1567. Dental care has a large impact on individuals with disabilities and that is true to individuals with Down syndrome. With data and clear recommendations, we can work towards improving access to services but also ensures the highest quality of dental care. I welcome the opportunity to further discuss insights and lived experiences of those we serve. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to improving the dental and oral health outcomes for individuals with disabilities in our state.

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