

Testimony
Senate Bill No. 2112
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Judy Lee, Chairman
January 13, 2025

Chairman Lee, and members of the Senate 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 Senate Bill No. 2112, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

The Life Skills and Transition Center (LSTC) Youth Transition Program is dedicated to supporting youth in crisis who require stabilization and have complex needs. The program serves as a vital bridge, offering these youth the opportunity to develop the essential skills needed to successfully reintegrate into their chosen community. By providing targeted support, LSTC aims to empower these youth to lead more independent and fulfilling lives.

LSTC's Approach is built on three core goals:

- Goal 1: Empower youth with the skills necessary to achieve the highest level of independence, tailored to their unique abilities.
- Goal 2: Provide a structured, nurturing environment that helps build rapport with the youth, offering them guidance, motivation, and unwavering support in believing that they can achieve anything they set their hearts and minds to.
- Goal 3: To establish a consistent, replicable routine that can seamlessly transition into the community they choose to return to,

fostering seamless transition to life outside of LSTC, long-term success and stability.

LSTC utilizes a team-based, collaborative approach to ensure that every youth receives the most comprehensive care possible. The multi-disciplinary team works alongside the youth to develop a structured, 24-hour schedule that includes essential learning activities, opportunities to build social skills, and chances to explore and engage with the surrounding community.

Youth reside in a supportive environment consisting of a twelve-person residence with private bedrooms and shared living areas, divided into three suites, each with four rooms and a common living space. This layout encourages both privacy and social interaction. A team of dedicated staff provides 24-hour support across all areas of daily living. When assigning youth to their living areas, we consider their individual abilities, age, gender, and risk factors to ensure a supportive and appropriate living environment. Each youth also receives a Risk Management Assessment Plan, which helps identify and address potential risks in key areas such as activities of daily living, behavioral health, medical needs, and community living. This ensures that each youth's safety and well-being are closely monitored and managed.

By providing a safe, nurturing, and structured environment, LSTC fosters trust and rapport with each youth, guiding and motivating them to overcome challenges and believe in their potential.

Through strong partnerships with local school districts, stakeholders, providers, other HHS partners (Developmental Disabilities, Children and Family Services, and Behavioral Health) and families, these partnerships have been instrumental in the successful reintegration of youth back into

their chosen communities. Over the past three years, 12 youth have been successfully transitioned in from a crisis/stabilization placement at LSTC back to home and community. This success highlights that successful stabilization services, like those offered by LSTC, can effectively meet the diverse needs of youth in crisis.

At LSTC, safety is always a top priority. We are committed to continuously assessing and managing the risks and vulnerabilities of the youth in our care to provide a safe, supportive environment for all. LSTC is dynamic and ever-evolving, regularly evaluating the needs of those we serve and adjusting our approach to ensure that we are providing the highest level of care and support for youth in crisis who are working toward stabilization and community reintegration.

Given the current challenges in North Dakota and the demand for services, the Youth Transition Program at LSTC offers a comprehensive, effective solution for stabilizing youth in crisis and equipping them with the skills they need to thrive in their communities. This program stands as a testament to the Department's commitment to providing the best care and opportunities for youth, despite the constraints that exist.

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