Testimony
Department of Human Services
Health Care Reform Committee
Representative Keiser, Chairman
May 14, 2014

Chairman Keiser and members of the Health Care Reform Committee, I am Dr. Rosalie Etherington, a licensed psychologist and the clinical director of the North Dakota State Hospital for the North Dakota Department of Human Services. I am testifying today on the proposed amendment to the mental health commitment statute to include advanced practice nurses, as an identified group of qualified mental health professionals, authorized to seek behavioral health commitments.

The majority of North Dakota counties are identified as medically underserved areas. Forty-one of fifty-three counties are identified as a health care professional shortage area. Behavioral health providers are even scarcer with forty-seven of fifty-three counties identified as a mental health care professional shortage area. Expanding the commitment laws to include advance practice nurses could conceivably help meet the rural behavioral health care needs in North Dakota.

Advanced Practice Nurses provide services in outpatient, residential, and hospital levels of care within the public and private sector. Any time there is expansion of scope and authority there is a learning curve for all, and it is appreciated that this committee is looking at both risks and benefits. A clearly defined scope of practice within the nursing licensing board and the statute will assist in mitigating potential risks that might exist. Based on the information presented, it appears the benefits of extending the behavioral

health workforce outweigh the potential risks of newly authorized experts extending their service beyond their readiness.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendment.

I would be willing to answer any questions.