

TESTIMONY – INTERIM TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY STUDY – JUNE 19, 2014**HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION****REPRESENTATIVE CHUCK DAMSCHEN, CHAIRMAN**

Chairman Damschen, members of the Interim Committee of the Human Services Committee Divisions; I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Traumatic Brain Injury. For the record I am Rhonda Boehm; my son Eric Boehm suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury in 2002 at the age of 14 in a tragic motor vehicle accident. Today he is 26 years old and has become a young energetic adult; although his adulthood will be different because he is living with a Traumatic Brain Injury with numerous cognitive impairments and challenges for the rest of his life.

As you have heard over the course of this study, is that working your way through the maze of services, resources and eligibility for assistance programs for traumatic brain injury is a confusing, time-consuming, and often frustrating process for people with NO brain injury, therefore for the Brain Injury survivor it is nearly impossible. That is why you now hear a united call from the Traumatic Brain Injury community for a more coordinated and comprehensive system of care of long-term brain injury services, assistances, and support.

I previously presented a proposal suggesting to implement a Flex Plan Fund to assist the Mid-functioning Traumatic Brain Injury survivors. I will recap my earlier testimony from the January 7th, 2014 Interim Meeting:

The Flex Plan Fund would be beneficial to qualifying Mid-Functioning Traumatic Brain Injury Survivors who are employed at their highest level of capacity, and will most likely never be able to obtain a high-end employment/career because of their cognitive and physical disabilities. It is observed consistently that these individuals often need & want to provide for themselves and end up unable to support themselves financially; and unfortunately all too often end up in poverty, homeless, or in correctional facilities. Our goal is to help every individual become as independent as they can, assist them and to keep them employed. It significantly costs the state and federal government every time another Traumatic Brain Injury Survivor hits poverty level, or is placed in a correctional institution. It is observed that these individuals' outcomes could be changed, with more assistance/guidance in place such as the Flex Fund Plan for additional financial assistance, along with more support in other areas.

It would be very beneficial for Mid-Functioning Traumatic Brain Injury Survivors to continue working in the employment world at their capability, receive what assistance they currently qualify for while working, and with the addition of the Flex Plan Fund assistance, they could most likely remain independent working class citizens. We need to help keep them from

quitting their “lower paying” jobs because of financial difficulties, because it is almost always a detrimental spiral effect on their lives and they lose hope in becoming independent and their chances of remaining a working class citizen is decreased.

It is vitally important and necessary that the comprehensive system of care include (but not be limited to):

- 1) Implementation of the Flex Plan Fund Proposal or significant changes in existing assistance programs; to allow for additional financial assistance for Mid-Functioning Traumatic Brain Injury survivors in maintaining their independence and remaining employed. This assistance could be based on a sliding scale of needs of individuals with varying levels of Traumatic Brain Injury, focusing the Flex Plan Fund towards those individuals who are “Mid-functioning”.
- 2) The Brain Injury Registry needs to be re-established and should allow for areas of entry outside of a hospital setting to allow brain injured individuals who move to North Dakota to access the registry .
- 3) There is a need for increased residential, transitional and independent living options for individuals with traumatic brain injury.
- 4) The need to expand the definition of brain injury to include “Acquired Brain Injury.

I’m asking you to please support the components I have spoken about today. The Department Of Human Services, and UND have provided research at the interim meetings regarding benefits, costs and comments. These reports and comments are very important to all Traumatic Brain Injury Survivors. I will always remember this....my son Eric said in an interview with the Minot Daily News, six months after his accident.....”I just want to be normal again”this is the feeling of most all Traumatic Brain Injury Survivors and through a long hard process they learn what their “new normal is” and then need extra and continued guidance and assistance to continue to move forward living their life with a traumatic brain injury.

I will close with the motto of the North Dakota Head Injury Association.....”No Brain Injury Is Too Small To Ignore, Or Too Severe To Lose Hope.” Thank you for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Rhonda Boehm