



Testimony to the
Energy Development and Transmission Committee
 Prepared Friday August 28, 2015 by
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 Presented by
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Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to address the challenges in day to day operations as a result of the oil impact on our community. These impacts affect many areas from the clients we serve, the work force and the mental health and addiction services available in the community.

Since July of 2011, Williams County Social Services has been tracking the “oil impact” cases within Child Welfare and Economic Assistance Programs. Families or individuals who are involved in services with our agency and moved here after 2010 are considered an oil impact case. The following are the impacts seen for each program:

Child Protection Services

2015 48%
 2014 55%
 2013 46%
 2012 45%
 2011 22%

Foster Care

2015 67%
 2014 62%
 2013 48%
 2012 51%
 2011 28%

In Home Case Management

2015 50%
 2014 58%
 2013 45%
 2012 28%
 2011 No statistics

Economic Assistance Programs

2015 58%
 2014 50%
 2013 60%
 2012 56%
 2011 32%

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As a result of this we face new challenges on a regular basis. Families are more transient, living in campers or moving from the household to household of friends and family. Multiple families are residing in one single apartment or home. This increases the amount of time it takes for workers to locate and address issues with families. Language and cultural barriers makes it difficult to communicate and address issues. The agency has had to access translation services in order to adequately communicate with the clients. There continues to be a rise in cases with concerns for physical abuse (discipline with objects). Families are moving here from others states or countries where it is not considered abuse to use objects to discipline their children. We continue to receive many concerns with domestic and familial violence. There is an increase in the number of cases in which children have broken bones which are a result of non-accidental injuries. Marijuana is legalized in other states and the families do not see the need to stop since they have a medical card or it is legal where they are from. There continues to be an increase in drug exposed children. Children are being exposed to drugs such as methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin, to name a few. There is a higher safety risk for staff due to the unpredictable behavior of individuals under the influence of these drugs. As a result, we have to send two staff or request law enforcement assistance. Safety with in the office has been a concern due to unpredictable behavior and concerns for angry clients when they are told they do not qualify for services. The sliding glass window in the reception area is being replaced with safety windows as the result of an angry client throwing a clipboard at the receptionist.

In the Child Protection Unit there has been a steady increase in the number of Child Protection Reports received since 2006. The following are those statistics:

- 2006 – 343 reports received
- 2007 - 399
- 2008 - 435
- 2009 - 426
- 2010 - 438
- 2011 - 416
- 2012 - 472
- 2013 - 516
- 2014 - 590
- 2015 – Projected to be 675 (450 to date)

When there is an increase in Child Protection cases you can usually anticipate an increase in Foster Care and In Home Case Management. One of the trends seen is there are more infants and young children in foster care. This can be contributed to the increase in the number of children removed at birth. These removals are a result of the baby or mother testing positive for drugs at birth. At times the babies are transported to the hospital in Minot due to complications as a result of the drug exposure.

The Economic Assistance programs have seen an increase in the alien population which is served. There are increased requests for emergency Medicaid services for illegal/undocumented aliens. There are increased requests for medical and food assistance for

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Licensed Permanent Residents (Green card). New LPR are unable to receive medical or food assistance due to the requirement of being in the country for five years or have 40 quarters of work. There is an increase in the Refuge population as they are relocating here from Fargo for work. Single males are relocating to the area to find a job but are unable to secure immediate employment. There is an increase in the single individual population under the age of 65 applying for medical services due to Medicaid Expansion. Due to the decline in oil there is an increase in request for medical and food assistance from intact families. This is due to the applicants being laid off due to the decline in the oil and gas industry. Individuals and families are unable to make ends meet and meet their nutritional needs due to high rent costs. The agency receives SNAP applications that are expedited (emergency) however clients are not eligible due to the high shelter costs and capped Federal rent deduction. There is an increase in individuals who apply for Medicaid in order to receive help with Mental Health and Drug or Alcohol abuse. The lack of community resources in these areas results in a greater dependency on public assistance and decreased ability for clients to become self-sufficient.

The clients are in need of a variety of services including mental health, addiction, medical, dental, and child care. Many times these services are not readily available to the clients due to wait lists or lack of these services directly in the community. Clients need to travel to Minot or Bismarck in order to access services such as inpatient mental health and addiction services. Teenagers, who are in Williams County Social Services custody and are in need of addiction services cannot be placed in a county home, PATH or Eckert because they could not receive the addiction services locally and are placed out of county. Intensive In-home therapy which is designed to avoid placement by working with the family in their home is not available in Williams County. This lack of available services impacts Williams County Social Services as it causes staff to travel to other communities to see the children in our custody or to access services for them. The parents/caregivers are unable to readily access the services they need in order to address their issues. There are no resources in the community for the Refugee population.

The Home and Community Based Service Program which serves the elderly/disabled population has seen a steady decrease in the number of clients served in the past five years. There were approximately 95 open cases each month in 2010 and currently there are 44 open cases. Many of the elderly and disabled could not afford to live in Williston with the rising cost of living during that time period. Also, some individuals had too high of an income (\$50,000 or more in assets) and would be considered self-pay through the program.

Staff at Williams County Social Services has steadily increased since 2009 to meet the service demands. In 2009 there were thirteen eligibility workers, six HCBS staff and thirteen child welfare staff. In 2015 there are fifteen eligibility workers, one HCBS staff and twenty five child welfare staff. During the past six years the agency has frequently had positions open for 6 months or longer. The inability to fill the positions has been due to lack of affordable housing and a lack of qualified applicants. Williams County has provided housing options for essential service workers. In the past, only licensed social workers could be hired for child welfare positions. This year Family Service Specialists, who have degrees in social work, psychology,

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criminal justice, sociology or counseling, can be hired to fill child welfare positions. Williams County Social Services currently has all positions filled.

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