

**Interim Political Subdivision Taxation Committee**  
**January 12, 2016**  
**County Social Service Financing**  
**Kim Jacobson, Director – Traill County Social Services**

Chairman Dockter and members of the Interim Political Subdivision Taxation Committee, for the record my name is Kim Jacobson. I serve as the Director of Traill County Social Service located in Hillsboro, North Dakota. I am a member with the North Dakota County Director's Association and I am appointed as a member of the County Social Services Financing Workgroup. I am appearing today to share information related to county social service shared services.

North Dakota County Social Service Agencies have a long tradition of providing local service to vulnerable North Dakota citizens. Our origins began as County Poor Relief, which was the early predecessor to North Dakota County Social Services. County Poor Relief was established with the first territorial assembly in 1862. County Poor Relief was included in the first North Dakota Constitution ratified in 1889. With the Great Depression, the State of North Dakota recognized the need for further infrastructure. In result, by 1935, all counties were mandated to implement County Social Service Boards and mandates were implemented requiring counties to meet the local human service need. Those mandates remain in force today.

Since the early days of social service programming, counties have worked very hard to meet local needs and prided themselves in building a quality county social service system. Just like many other local forms of government, each county

social service agency has unique challenges and strengths. These variances are based on local need and are often driven by the level of supportive services available in each community. In many communities, county social services is the hub of human service related service/referral and are viewed as the local service provider expert.

Throughout the years, counties have adapted to meeting the requirements of federal law and state policy. The War on Poverty, Entitlement Programs, Child Welfare Mandates, Title XX Programs, Older Americans Act, ICWA, Welfare Reform, ACA and Medicaid Expansion, etc. have all impacted the county social service world and the services provided. As each county adapted to meet the needs of local citizens and program requirements, counties often looked to one another for collaboration and support. In result, shared services evolved.

Shared services can be through both formal and informal arrangements and they may be done under contract or courtesy-type basis. Contracts include an agreement and frequently an exchange of dollars. Courtesy-type service often is less formal and does not include the exchange of dollars. Both are common practices in the North Dakota County Social Service system. The decision on the formality and funding associated with these services are a considered a local decision and can be impacted by a variety of factors. On some occasions, grants or state-contracts funds are in place to help assist with shared services.

To help illustrate the variety and implementation of common shared services, the North Dakota County Director's Association has developed a "County Social Services Shared Services Map." This is a visual tool to help demonstrate various collaborations and county innovation in a meaningful manner. A copy of the 2016 Shared Services Map has been provided to you. I will cover some of the highlights with you.

Shared services are used for a variety of reasons. At times, it may be more efficient, either fiscally or resource-wise, to participate in a shared services agreement. This is often the case if caseload is modest for some of the counties involved, program policy is complex and the need for great expertise is warranted. An example of this would include a collaborative between Richland and Ransom Counties. Approximately six years ago, the Home and Community Based Services caseload in Richland County was growing and became too much for one worker and Richland County added a part-time position to meet local need. Shortly after, a worker retired in Ransom County. Richland and Ransom Counties decided to partner, offer a full-time position to the employee which has offered stability and increased the level of expertise to both counties. A similar collaboration is in place between Mountrail County and Bottineau County. In this situation, Bottineau County provides spousal impoverishment eligibility services to Mountrail County. This is another area which requires expertise with a limited caseload. These are both partnership examples that work very well in meeting this specific need while demonstrating innovation and flexibility.

Shared services can also be beneficial during times of new employee training or during times of employee turnover. This can be on a temporary or long-term basis. Benefits of this type of shared service can bring increased knowledge, expertise, support and retention. An example of this type of situation occurred with Traill County and Cass County. A few years ago, Traill County had turnover in a Child Welfare Supervisory position. Cass County agreed to provide courtesy supervision to Traill County child welfare workers for three months until a new Traill County supervisor was hired. The new Traill County supervisor was also provided supervisory mentoring by Cass County in order to ensure a smooth transition process and support. Since that time, Traill County has provided supervisory and training support to Nelson County in the area of child welfare services.

In some instances, counties have formally banded together to operate as a social service district. Steve Reiser of Dakota Central Social Service District and Randi Suckut, Wells County Commissioner are on the agenda to speak today on their experiences with formalized shared service.

The Shared Services Map has been used for a number of years to help track changes in service delivery and collaboration methods. Through the years, there have been changes to the types of shared service. There are many factors that have prompted changes in shared services throughout the years.

Some of the most prevalent trends include:

- Changes in county leadership and vision
- Caseload increases – increased caseloads have led to less shared workers as counties need full-time personnel to meet their local needs.
- Changes in federal and state requirements, rules, and increased programs which have increased the volume of work and the need for full-time personnel to meet local need. Examples include changes to the child welfare system requiring monthly face-to-face visits with children in the county's custody and Medicaid Expansion.
- County social service directors who once served more than one county may now be carrying a client caseload in addition to his/her administrative duties. This has prompted the reduction in shared administrators. There has also been a shift for counties finding the need of providing a more frequent supervisory presence/leadership at the local level which has impacted the number of shared administration services.
- High dependency on county property tax dollars for providing county services has motivated local County Leaders to prioritize quality local service to citizens.
- Trial and Error. There have been successful examples of formalized shared service. There have also been examples of situations where the arrangement was viewed as unsuccessful by local leaders. Both have impacted the overall vision, investment and expectation of local service delivery.
- The federal requirement of monthly face-to-face visits with all children in foster care have greatly driven the collaboration between counties on both formal and informal basis.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you information regarding county shared services. I welcome any questions from the committee.