

## NORTH DAKOTA LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT POLITICAL SUBDIVISION TAXATION COMMITTEE

January 12, 2016

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

I am Randi Suckut, a commissioner of Wells County for 13 years. I hold a position on the Wells County Social Service Board, and am also on the Social Services Finance Working Group.

Thank you for allowing me to speak before you today.

I would like to give a background on the history of the shared services of Social Services of Foster, Eddy, and Wells counties.

The sharing of services started approximately 25 years ago.

Ed Christ, current Director of Grand Forks Social Services, previously was the Director in Foster County before becoming Director in Foster, Eddy, and Wells, was involved in the beginning of sharing of services shared his recollection of how and why it began. "We started strictly as a shared Director position. It happened that both Eddy and Wells had open Director positions at about the same time. I don't recall who initiated the idea of combining the 3 positions.

Anticipating a cost savings was one of the initial motivating factors. I do recall there were lively negotiations as to the breakdown of the cost for the Director position as all 3 counties had strong, out-spoken commissioners. I don't recall if we got very far sharing other positions. I believe we at least started the discussion to have one worker focus on programs like TANF and Long Term Care. The premise being a worker would be more efficient specializing rather than working a limited number of cases in a variety of programs. We did do peer reviews of eligibility cases. As I recall when we started, all of the staffs, social service boards, and commissions were very flexible and patient regarding giving the concept a try and I believe felt it was a positive move." Thus, the Tri-County Board of Social Services began.

John Mogren, retired Tri-County Social Service Director stated this, "Really I was the fortunate one serving in the position as Director when I did, because the ground work had been laid and Ed had done the most difficult part... and that was getting everyone to the table. Each year that we held the Tri-County Forum in the summer for the Board members, we provided them and the Commissioners (who attended) a report with all the aspects of F.E.W. (Foster. Eddy. Wells) multi-county arrangement. As I recall, there was a report of costs and savings to each county. This was used by the Tri-county board for their meeting which always followed the forum. In those reports there was a director's report to the board which would give a good yearly synopsis. Also when I was the director I developed an annual budget justification for each county. But Ed hit the nail on the head with his statement about TANF/Long Term Care. What I found is that workers that specialized in an area tended to be less stressed than those who were required to know all the programs. The peer reviews were excellent not only for helping catch mistakes but it developed a bond between the workers and they began to view themselves as part of a unit and not a separate entity. An "I got your back" attitude developed between the Eligibility Workers. So if one was out sick... or we had an opening they were so good to just pitch in and take the cases and help one

another out. They governed it themselves... they owned it. Perhaps the biggest challenge we faced was keeping social workers. It was good that I had a social work license because there were times I didn't leave the counties for months. But it always worked out and we'd get another social worker.

Each county still has their own Social Service Board to oversee their individual needs and employees. There is also a Tri-county board, which includes some of the members of each counties boards, to conduct the shared needs and shared employees of the Tri-County agreement.

Foster, Eddy, and Wells County currently share one director. Eligibility staff specializes in TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), Child Care, and Long Term Care. Some sharing of staff with that expertise is between the Tri Counties. One Foster Care Staff and One Social Work Supervisor is also shared. An in home worker and social worker for home and community based services is shared between Foster and Eddy County. An office staff is shared between Foster and Eddy with an MOU for Fiscal Service to Foster County. In home, Parent Aide, and Foster Care work is shared with the Child and Family Services Staff.

Foster County currently has 5 employees, Eddy county has 4 employees, Wells County has 9 employees and Tri-County shares 3 employees.

Of the shared services and employees, Foster County pays 34% of the costs, Eddy County pays 24%, and Wells pays 42%. This is based off of a combination of land valuations, population, and caseloads.

One of the problems that we face is the difference in what one mill brings from each county. Foster County is \$23,117 per mill, Eddy County is \$12,409, and Wells is \$38,078. This is a major problem when caseloads in each county may be similar but 20 mills in each county are vastly different. This could be alleviated if the state takes over the costs using caseload as a part of the basis for reimbursement.

This is where we are today.

Within the last year, Foster, Eddy, and Wells are starting to take the steps to forming a Tri-County Social Service District. We expect to gain further efficiencies by becoming a district in the following ways:

1. Social Service Director will work under one board instead of three plus the Tri-County Board, which should save in time management.
2. Social Service Director will only need to prepare one budget instead of three separate budgets, one for each county, and only working with one auditor instead of three.
3. All employees would be employees of the district(one county) and therefore would be able to do work in all three counties. This should improve services to the public by employees becoming more specialized.
4. All employees would be under one personnel policy manual. This has basically been completed by making the social service policy manuals in the three counties identical.
5. There would be one payroll and one county host for benefits and technology sharing.(NRG)
6. The movement of monies between counties should be improved.

We don't expect there that there will be any further cost savings involved with forming a district because the cost savings has already taken place with the sharing of services that we already have, but we do expect that there will be savings in time.

The only thing that could possibly be a detriment with regards to an agreement to the sharing of services, which we do, or to forming a district would be that it may be harder to hire a director willing to work within three counties and also the distance of traveling involved.

Previous files of Mr. Mogren note concerns for:

1. Adequately allowing for reimbursements to each county. (This will seem to be a moot point in 2016/2017, if we form a district or if state assumes cost of Social Services.)
2. That it may not provide any additional cost savings. Services may be more appropriately streamlined.
3. Training – we may not be able to only send one staff from the three counties if state training is offered as they often request that all workers attend.
4. Mileage and Distance – workload and supervision would be affected by this as we are not collectively under one roof. It is hoped that as technology evolves that more on line application and more remote work can be done. Each county does have a consumer kiosk if consumers wish to apply on line for services and do not have internet access.
5. Telephone- some are long distance # between Eddy, Foster, and Wells. We do have on line access and on line application procedures as well as toll free # for consumers. Staff attempt to use email and on line instant messaging for immediate communication as well as cell phones. There is a dedicated line for 24/7 emergency contact for social service needs. A child and family services worker carries that phone and can triage and re direct calls as needed.
6. We cross lines for DHS Regions III and VI – this does create some issues for services even though the tri county unit has been in existence for some time. Eddy is in Region III and Foster and Wells are in Region VI.
7. Transition and Change- a barrier for all staff and consumers alike.
8. The boards will need transition time as well going from three boards one. This will create some gender equity issues for those counties whom only want to delegate commissioners to the Social Service Board per Century Code. Foster County at present would need to appoint a female as they have only male commissioners.
9. The current Shared Director is a County Director III , approaching a IV as defined by HRMS. Determinations for classifications by HRMS are defined by populous, caseload, and budget for County Directors.

SALARY ONLY 2015 Est.

**WELLS COSTS AND SAVINGS - 2015 INTER-COUNTY SHARING**

		<b>COST</b>	<b>SAVINGS</b>
DIRECTOR	\$	31,752.00	\$ 43,848.00
SOCIAL WORKER SUPR.	\$	23,612.40	\$ 32,607.60
FOSTER CARE SW	\$	20,240.64	\$ 27,951.36
CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT GRANT	\$	28,227.67	\$ 38,981.07
IM WORKERS - TRAINING			
IM WORKERS - PROGRAMS WORKED			\$ 1,095.97
SW WORKERS - TRAINING	\$	1,199.68	\$ 129.18
SW WORKERS - PROGRAMS WORKED	\$	6,275.55	\$ 2,666.78
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>111,307.94</b>	<b>\$ 147,279.96</b>

**FOSTER COST AND SAVINGS - 2015 INTER-COUNTY SHARING**

		<b>COST</b>	<b>SAVINGS</b>
DIRECTOR	\$	24,192.00	\$ 51,408.00
SOCIAL WORKER SUPR.	\$	17,990.40	\$ 32,607.60
FOSTER CARE SW	\$	15,421.44	\$ 31,806.72
CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT GRANT	\$	21,506.80	\$ 45,701.95
HCBS SW	\$	25,593.00	\$ 25,593.00
IM WORKERS - TRAINING			
IM WORKERS - PROGRAMS WORKED	\$	2,007.24	
SW WORKERS - TRAINING	\$	496.56	\$ 758.58
SW WORKERS - PROGRAMS WORKED	\$	820.59	\$ 7,470.49
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>108,028.03</b>	<b>\$ 195,346.34</b>

**EDDY COST AND SAVINGS - 2015 INTER-COUNTY SHARING**

		<b>COST</b>	<b>SAVINGS</b>
DIRECTOR	\$	19,656.00	\$ 55,944.00
SOCIAL WORKER SUPR.	\$	14,617.20	\$ 41,602.80
FOSTER CARE SW	\$	12,529.92	\$ 35,662.08
CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT GRANT	\$	17,474.27	\$ 49,734.47
HCBS SW	\$	25,593.00	\$ 25,593.00
IM WORKERS - TRAINING			
IM WORKERS - PROGRAMS WORKED	\$	40.08	\$ 427.11
SW WORKERS - TRAINING	\$	198.94	\$ 927.02
SW WORKERS - PROGRAMS WORKED	\$	4,407.52	\$ 4,236.38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>94,516.93</b>	<b>\$ 214,126.86</b>