

## Testimony

Human Services Interim Committee

May 10, 2016

Submitted by Lynelle Fraser, LSW and Cindy Andrade, LSW

Chairman Hogan, members of the Human Services Interim Committee, I am Lynelle Fraser a Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Case Manager for Pembina and Cavalier County Social Services. With me today is Cindy Andrade, a Home and Community Based Services case manager from Grand Forks County Social Services and a member of the Adult Services Committee, a sub-committee of the North Dakota County Social Services Director's Association). I am here today in regard to the decrease in reimbursement of homemaker services that will drastically affect the Homemaker clients and their family caregivers. These cuts will reduce the reimbursement to agency and individual QSPs by nearly 50% starting in July, 2016 and are a result of DHS budget allotment.

Homemaker Services provide light housework, laundry, shopping and other non-personal care duties to persons living in their own home. The Homemaker Service is often the building block or gateway to services and is often the acceptable service to the elderly and individuals with disabilities. Homemaker services can be provided with a minimum of service – for example vacuuming every other week. This can be acceptable to a person somewhat resistant to having someone in their home. As they learn to know and trust the provider they often become open to more assistance – carrying out the garbage, helping with the laundry. We may be able to refer them for Meals on Wheels. As the trust builds, the person may be open to personal care. These services keep people in their home at a much more fiscally appropriate rate. We also provide so much more than just cleaning a person's home. We are often access to the outside for that person. The provider can become a reference in time for the client because they know they receive services on a certain day.

The drastic decrease in reimbursement has meant that some private agencies have informed counties that they will no longer be providing Homemaker Services to new clients. This lower reimbursement for services will mean the reimbursement rate does not equal the hourly rate

counties and other agency QSPs are paying their employees. This does not include mileage and other benefits. Individual QSPs will need to decide if they can afford to provide Homemaker Services, at the reduced rate,

The possible loss, or reduction, in qualified service providers for Homemaker services means we are in the midst of losing a much needed step in the continuum of care. It could be a loss of access to necessary services. It will put more pressure on family members who will need to help or may need to relocate their family member where some type of services may be available. Homemaker Services can provide some relief, even respite, to family members by providing one other person who can help out in the home. Family members then can be the resource for medical transportation, money management and other areas that may be needed. Without Homemaker Services there could be a ripple effect which will then result in an increase in vulnerable adult reports.

Home and Community Based Services needs to be expanded, not limited. One suggestion is to return Homemaker Services to a more appropriate reimbursement level. By increasing the reimbursement levels, individual and agency QSPs may again agree to provide these much needed services. Another suggestion is to update the sliding fee scale which is used to determine cost shares for our clients. This fee scale has not seen an adjustment since August, 2009. Our suggestion is to provide adjustments to the sliding fee scale and provide annual cost inflators to reflect the cost of living increases provided by Social Security. This change would mean the sliding fee scale would reflect the annual changes in standard monthly Social Security benefits. In making services more available and more affordable, the elderly and individuals with disabilities are more apt to remain in their home and communities.

These reimbursement changes will most likely have an extremely negative effect on the availability of Homemaker Services. Case managers are at a loss as to how best provide these much needed services to new clients when agency and individual QSPs are stating they will not take new clients. Case managers are available in each county to answer your questions as is the Adult Services Committee. This concludes my comments. Thank you for your time and I would be willing to answer any questions you may have at this time.