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On Behalf of Youthworks
Testimony on HB 1035
House Judiciary Committee

Chairman Klemin and Members of the Committee:

I testify today on behalf of Youthworks in favor of HB 1035. Youthworks is a private non-profit agency governed by a Board of Directors with more than 30 direct service professionals based in the two largest cities in North Dakota and serves the entire state. The mission of the agency is “Helping Homeless, Runaway, Trafficked, and Struggling Youth in North Dakota.” Since 1987, YW has been the statewide leader in educating community stakeholders about the struggles affecting runaway and homeless youth (“RHY”), in an effort to prevent and end youth homelessness. YW is in a unique position to meet all of the needs of North Dakota’s runaway, homeless, trafficked, and street youth due to the vast array of services provided, including many federally funded programs.

Youthworks has decades of experience assisting youth who have encountered the justice and child welfare systems. The agency administers the guardian ad litem program, diversion programs for juvenile justice-involved youth, provides attendant care and shelter care for youth struggling with family conflict, and provides counseling and supportive services for families in crisis. In providing its services, Youthworks is rooted in the core concepts of positive youth development and youth empowerment. The agency, based upon its experience and core beliefs, has long advocated for approaches like those proposed in HB 1035. The changes proposed to Chapter 27 focus on the root causes of behavioral problems and offer an approach that is rooted in evidence and focused on support and services. Youthworks joins in the many statements offered here today in support of HB 1035, and believes the well-considered and evidence-based reforms

will greatly improve our State's ability to better support struggling youth and assist them in achieving a happy and stable adult life. The reforms set forth in HB 1035 allow increased access to services without the trauma of arrest and avoid known negative consequences for youth by eliminating "status offenses." They increase advocacy on behalf of struggling youth by expanding access to legal representation and ensure statewide compliance with evidence-based assessments and targeted interventions. Youthworks supports and applauds the many stakeholders who have come together to create HB 1035 and strongly urges a "do pass" recommendation.