

**Senate Appropriations Committee**

Testimony on House Bill 1015

Senator Ray Holmberg – Chairman

March 17, 2021

Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, my name is Donna Byzewski and I am one of the guardianship directors at Catholic Charities North Dakota (CCND). I am respectfully asking your committee to support an adjustment to Public Administrators Support Services (PASS) funding to \$2.5 million which would result in an increase in the funded caseload to 320 wards.

In February 2020, Catholic Charities North Dakota began providing guardianship services on behalf of individuals with mental health issues, vulnerable elderly persons and people with a traumatic brain injury. A guardianship program in Devils Lake made the decision to no longer provide guardianship services and Catholic Charities ND stepped up to fill this need. Thirty guardianship cases were transferred to Catholic Charities ND of which 25 were funded by the PASS program. Catholic Charities ND would not have been able to assume responsibility for these cases had it not been for PASS funding. We provide guardianship services for individuals who live in Fargo, West Fargo, Arthur, Mayville, Ellendale, Jamestown, Devils Lake, Rugby, Lakota, Minot, Bottineau, Cando, Valley City, Carrington, Maddock, and Grand Forks.

Currently, our guardianship program is serving as guardian for 33 individuals. We receive PASS funding for 31 of the 33 individuals. We also have 13 people who are on our waiting list for services. Many of our referrals have come from judges, Vulnerable Adult Protective Services, hospitals, Veterans Administration and families. To continue to meet the guardianship needs of indigent people in North Dakota, it is vital that funding for the PASS program be increased. It would be devastating to vulnerable people to languish on a waiting list because of limited funding. Often the circumstances in their life place them at risk of harm and they need the support of a guardian. Increased PASS funding is extremely important to ensure that our most vulnerable people do not fall through the cracks and go without needed services. Thank you for your time and consideration.