

Testimony Prepared for the
House Judiciary Committee

March 30, 2021

By: Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

**RE: House Bill 1427 – Duties related to the Commission on Juvenile Justice,
Children’s Cabinet, and Planning Committee for Children in Need of Service
(CHINS)**

Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Kim Jacobson. I am the Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director, encompassing the service area of Traill and Steele Counties, and a member of the North Dakota Social Service Director Association. In addition, I am an appointed member of the North Dakota Children’s Cabinet serving as a community representative. Please consider my testimony in support of HB 1427 with proposed amendment.

Last week, the Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony related to HB 1035 which would modernize and make significant changes to the North Dakota Juvenile Court Act. I support the changes proposed in HB 1035 with delayed implementation. The delay is necessary as to ensure the service response critical for successfully meet the needs of North Dakota children and their families is in place. Additional time is necessary for the intent of law called for in HB 1035 to be upheld along with accountability metrics to be developed.

As a Human Service Zone Director, I am the legal custodian of 19 children in foster care and most recently the legal guardian for 65 unaccompanied minor children who were previously served by Lutheran Social Services. There is a currently shortfall of services to support and meet the needs of current children and their families served in the child welfare system. However, there are many opportunities on the horizon that will likely help expand services. For example, additional services will be possible through the 1915i waiver. This appears very

promising. However, additional services and providers are not in place yet. Existing resources are limited.

As a Human Service Zone Director, I am keenly aware that with the changes in HB 1035 if enacted will bring an increase in the number of children and the families served at the human service zone level. To best serve children and families, changes are needed. I strongly believe that many of the children in the current unruly system would be better served in a strength-based, family-centric system and response that is provided within the human service zone system. However, again we need time and guidance to prepare/develop services, develop policy, clarify roles, and be ready to serve our citizens in this expanded capacity.

As a member of the North Dakota Children's Cabinet, I am also aware of the system bottlenecks, gaps, and changes in federal requirements. We need to work together to improve and redesign the way systems and programs work to best meet the needs of children and their families. The scope of work for the proposed planning committee includes seeking ways to improve to the continuum of care, increase cooperation and collaboration between agencies and systems, develop policies and processes, develop metrics to track and report, and study how best to address shelter care is greatly needed. Upon passage of this bill, I look forward to collaborative with the planning committee through my role of the Children's Cabinet and as Human Service Zone Director to help bring forth positive change and a more modern, responsive child welfare delivery system for North Dakota.

I do offer one additional amendment for the committee to consider. My suggested amendment would appear on Page 2, line 30 by striking "*commission on juvenile justice*" replacing with "*children's cabinet.*" This change will align the reporting of the children in need of service (CHINS) planning committee to the children's cabinet. The children's cabinet is responsible for guiding, accessing, and coordinating care across North Dakota branches of government and tribal nations. The children's cabinet is more suitable to receive such report.

Their role includes to oversee overarching children's and community-based systems which would including CHIN (children in need of service) trends, needs and services. Of note, I support the proposed language which provides for the commission of juvenile justice to receive reports from the juvenile justice planning committee. This appears to be the correct fit as both groups are grounded in the juvenile justice/corrections systems.

This concludes my testimony on HB 1427. I stand for questions from the committee.