

DHS Public Comment
January 25, 2017
HB 1012 and 1072

Long Term Care

Shelly Peterson, President of the Long Term Care Association, took the lead to ask the committee to reinstate the allotment cuts and an inflator for nursing homes. She stated that they would support a provider assessment/tax if there was no other way to get the funding for nursing homes.

Administrators of nursing homes and basic care facilities testified how the allotment cuts have caused them to cut back on services and buy cheaper supplies. Six basic care facilities have closed due to these cuts and other budget issues. The basic care in Wilton, ND run by Pride Inc. is experiencing a loss of at least \$19,000 a year due to allotment cuts. They provide service to 16 individuals in this basic care who have behavioral health needs. The Pride Inc. board has continued to keep this facility operational to date, but it is unclear whether they will be able to keep it open if funding is not reinstated. According to the executive director, this facility saves the state a lot of money by providing a more cost effective alternative to the State Hospital.

A committee member questioned how nursing homes handled the change in payment system that occurred several years ago. This question was asked since a change in payment systems in being proposed for DD providers. The response was that the change was good, but for some entities it would have caused some hardship. Therefore, a transition period of 2 to 3 years was used to make the change easier.

Someone from PACE testified about their services, which provide an alternative to nursing home care. An individual needs to screen eligible for skilled nursing home care. This program provides coordinated care to avoid duplication in the home and day center environments. This option is a 20 to 30% saving over nursing home care and it allows individual who are eligible the option of staying in their home. If the person ends up moving from their home to a nursing home, PACE will pay the nursing home rate even though they are payed at a lower rate. They are starting to look at providing services to younger people and a development disabilities version of this model. Payment is usually through Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance or payment. Currently they are set up in Bismarck, Dickinson and Minot.

State Council on Development Disabilities (SCDD)

Protection & Advocacy and a SCDD council member testified on behalf of the council. The council member asked the committee to approve an FTE which is currently a temporary position. Both stated that the funding for the council, staff, operating expenses, and money given out as grants is federal dollars.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Nate Algaard, Executive Director of Freedom Resource Center, testified on behalf of the four Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in the state. He testified that they are not asking for additional funding, but want to maintain their current level of funding. Several recipients of CIL services testified regarding the positive impact services through the CILs have had on their level of independence and quality of life.

Testimony was given in support of full funding for Vocational Rehabilitation so they can meet their state match of 23%, allowing them then to draw down federal funding allotted to North Dakota. Kirsten Dvorak, The Arc of Bismarck, testified regarding the role of Vocational Rehabilitation in assisting individuals with disabilities to become employed in the community. She talked about how current law allows employers to pay individuals with disabilities sub-minimum wages. According to the Department of Labor, there are 17 employers in North Dakota with subminimum wage certificates. Individuals can be successful working in competitive employment. This is achieved by working with employers to carve out positions within their companies and by providing job coaching for support while learning the job.

Testimony was also given in support of the Older Blind Program and how it has assisted individuals in North Dakota with varying degrees of sight loss. There are vision specialists in each of the regional VR offices. These specialists work with individuals in their home and work place to provide ways to accommodate sight loss. Individuals eligible for the program need to be 55 years of age or older. It is estimated that there are 24,000 people in ND with some type of sight loss. Of those 24,000, approximately 6000 are legally blind and cannot drive. It is difficult for those who cannot drive to access services. Therefore the vision specialist from the regional offices travel to rural sites to help with vision solutions.

Testimony was given in support of Assistive which was formerly IPAT. Assistive has offices in Mandan and Fargo. Assistive can provide evaluations, access and training on assistive technology.

Children and Family Services

Donene Feist testified in support of funding for the services available through Family Voices of ND. They advocate on behalf of children with special health care needs. They provide training and workshops for parents. They link up experienced parents with parents who have just received a diagnosis for their children. Currently, they have staff in all regional centers, with the exception of Minot. Bismarck staff travel to Minot. Dickinson has a part time staff person. Family Voices staff work out of their home as a way to reduce overhead. There has been a steady increase in the number of calls to the program since 2010. Currently Family Voices receives \$75,000 in state money and \$100,000 in contracts and grants.