

**TESTIMONY REGARDING
SB 2409 ABORTION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM
INTERIM JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

August 7, 2006

Chairperson Delmore, members of the Interim Judiciary Committee, I am John Hougen, Director of Public Assistance of the Department of Human Services (DHS). I am here today to report on the status of the Alternatives-to-Abortion Services Program provided under 2005 SB 2409.

SB 2409 gave DHS responsibility to establish an Alternatives-to-Abortion Service Program in North Dakota, and directed DHS to seek funds from the federal office of faith based and community initiatives for this purpose. As I indicated in the November 14, 2005 report, funds from that source are not available. Funds from the TANF block grant are being used to fund this effort. TANF “Charitable Choice” regulations (45 CFR 260.34) govern the administration of this program.

DHS provides alternatives-to-abortion services by making vouchers available to individuals needing the service. Those individuals use the vouchers to access the service, and the service provider uses the voucher to bill DHS. This method allows DHS to pay all interested providers for these services. DHS contacted all agencies that now provide alternatives-to-abortion services. These agencies became partners in developing this program, and currently receive payment through the program for their services. The eight agencies currently providing alternatives-to-abortion services and receiving payment through this program are:

- Catholic Charities of North Dakota;**
- Christian Family Life Services;**
- First Choice Clinic;**
- Perry Center;**
- St. Gianna’s Maternity Home;**

- The Village Family Service Center;
- Women's Pregnancy Center; and
- YFC Teem Moms.

The Mental Health Association is also a partner, allowing use of the 211 hotline to direct referrals to the Alternatives-to-Abortion Services Program. We are developing a script for Mental Health Association staff to use when they get a 211 call regarding an unplanned pregnancy. Included in the script will be a question about where the caller lives, allowing staff to direct the caller to an alternatives-to-abortion provider in her area.

The Alternatives-to-Abortion Services Program became operational shortly before the beginning of the year. Eight service providers have submitted claims to date, and all have been paid, or are approved for payment, totaling \$43,555.00, through July 31, 2006. The total of all clients served and billed for all months since the program began was 556 as of July 31. That is not an "unduplicated" count, as some clients received services in more than one month. Also, because we anticipate receiving vouchers in the future for services already provided, the client count, and the total cost, remains incomplete.

The voucher process is proving to be an effective way to deliver this service, and the current rate of spending suggests that the \$500,000 appropriated in SB 2409 is sufficient for the intended purpose.

It would be my pleasure to respond to any questions.