

Testimony
Senate Concurrent Resolution 4008
Department of Human Services
House Human Services Committee
Representative Price, Chair
March 20, 2007

Chair Price and members of the House Human Services Committee, my name is Paul Ronningen, Director, Children and Family Services with the Department of Human Services. I am here today to present testimony regarding Senate Concurrent Resolution 4008. The Department supports the passage of this resolution.

I was pleased to serve on the Children's Justice Initiative Task Force under the leadership of Chief Justice VandeWalle this past year. This study resolution captures many of the crucial issues that were discussed and reported out as recommendations in the Final Report that you have received.

Child welfare efforts are always directed toward safety, permanency and well being for every child. The programs we support and the services we offer to families and extended family members with our county and private non-profit partners are integral to providing this net of safety, permanence and well being. As you well know, funding and the complexity of state and federal funding streams is a significant factor in providing services across the state. There must be attention to consistency of services and a focus on the complexity of providing services to both rural and urban areas.

Maintaining quality staff with supervision can be a challenge in many areas of the state-both rural and urban. Similarly, maintaining the

quality of our child welfare services remain a focus of our Division, and the federal government as well.

During the 2007 biennium, the State of North Dakota will under go a **Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) in April 2008.** In September 2001, the first Federal CFSR Review was completed. Though North Dakota received the highest rating in the nation, all 50 states and two territories were found to be deficient and were required to negotiate a Program Improvement Plan. North Dakota successfully completed its program improvement plan in 2006.

In addition, North Dakota will undergo a **Federal IV-E Audit in August 2008.** This audit is conducted every three years. North Dakota successfully passed this audit in 2005 with only one error found in the 80 cases under review. Several other states in the nation had more than the four errors allowed. Thus, a secondary audit of 150 cases was required by the Federal Government in these states. Fiscal sanctions are applied when cases are found in error.

Engaging State legislators in the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) is critical to our efforts to bring about ongoing improvement in North Dakota's child welfare system.

The Department of Human Services has been awarded a Section 1115 demonstration grant, from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), which focuses on the collaboration of the Child Support Enforcement and Child Welfare programs. Under this grant, we will be exploring a number of areas to see what processes may need to be changed, and what new concepts we may want to apply, in

order to improve services to children and families and improve program results.

Thus, with the issues raised in SB 4008, the grant award, and the upcoming federal reviews, the Department supports this study resolution and the involvement of Legislators.

This concludes my formal testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.