

Testimony
Engrossed House Bill 1256 – Department of Human Services
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Judy Lee, Chairman
March 4, 2015

Madam Chairman and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, my name is Lauren Sauer. I am a behavioral health program administrator with the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division. I am here today to provide information on the impact of changes proposed in Engrossed House Bill No. 1256.

Section 2 of Engrossed House Bill No. 1256 replaces the definition of "traumatic brain injury" in chapter 50-06.4 with a definition of "brain injury." This broadens the scope of chapter 50-06.4 to include individuals impacted by brain injuries received by means other than physical trauma to the brain. This broad definition of "brain injury" is referred to as Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), defined by the Brain Injury Association of America, as an injury to the brain, which is not hereditary, congenital, degenerative, or induced by birth trauma. Examples of ABI include stroke, hypoxic or anoxic brain injury, and tumor. By definition, a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) would also be considered an ABI.

The current TBI treatment system governed by chapter 50-06.4, targets individuals with TBI only, keeping it in line with Federal Government grant initiatives and past state efforts. Individuals with ABI certainly have treatment and service needs; however, broadening the application of chapter 50-06.4 to a larger target population would increase access to current services and most likely would decrease available access to services for those with TBI.

Currently there is no way to accurately count the number of individuals that have a TBI or ABI in North Dakota. It is believed, though, that with the broadened definition, the number of individuals accessing services could increase significantly. It may also lead to some duplication as there are existing programs for stroke victims and perhaps others that are included in the ABI definition.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.