

Testimony
House Bill 1303
Senate Government & Veterans Affairs Committee
Senator Poolman, Chairman
March 17, 2017

Chairman Poolman and members of the Senate Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, I am Marcie Wuitschick, Director of Human Resources for the Department of Human Services (Department), and I am here today in opposition to House Bill 1303.

The Department understands the intent of HB 1303, and my purpose for testifying today is to share with you the impact that passage of HB 1303 would have on the operations of the Department of Human Services.

The vast majority of positions in the Department are related to direct care for clients. This includes addiction counselors, nurses, direct care associates, case managers, clinicians, and psychiatrists. To discontinue filling vacancies in these areas would have a negative impact on clients across North Dakota. The Department has three facilities that are accredited. The accreditation of those facilities would be in jeopardy due to the requirement of minimum staffing ratios, such as nurses and direct care staff. Without sufficient staff, we could be forced to shut down specific areas of the State Hospital or Life Skills & Transition Center. The eight regional human service centers are essentially behavioral health clinics, and not filling vacancies in those locations could result in clients who need services being placed on a waiting list, clients not receiving necessary medications, and increased violence towards staff and/or other clients. With many clients, lack of services provided will result in an

additional burden placed on other community resources such as law enforcement, emergency rooms and first responders.

The Department utilizes a formal approval process to fill any vacancy, in addition to seeking approval from the Governor's Hiring Council to fill critical vacant FTEs. This process has been in place for several years and we intend to continue to use it going forward.

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