

Testimony
Senate Concurrent Resolution 4025
Senator Lee, Chairman
Senate Human Services Committee
February 21, 2007

Senator Lee and members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Don Snyder, Foster Care Administrator for the Children and Family Services Division, Department of Human Services. I am here to offer testimony in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 4025.

Most young people make the transition from adolescence to adulthood with the support of their families, communities, and schools. However, our state's most vulnerable youth—youth aging out of the foster care system—lack this much-needed familial and social support. As a result, foster youth face enormous challenges in making a smooth transition to adulthood and building successful lives. Data indicates that former foster youth have higher rates of poverty, homelessness, victimization, criminal involvement/incarceration, low educational attainment, unemployment, mental health & substance abuse, and early child-bearing.

The fate of these young people impacts us all. As a state, we cannot afford the high costs that result from ignoring the plight of these youth. To keep our economy strong, our community safe, and our young people on track, we must work together to create opportunities to connect all youth to the education, employment, and support they need to transition into a successful adult life.

In 2001, North Dakota set the standard for foster care youth, scoring the highest of all fifty states in the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). In spite of these accomplishments, North Dakota lags far behind

many other states in preparing foster youth for the transition from Foster Care to adulthood.

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides excellent opportunities to many youth, but the resources are not nearly sufficient to meet the needs of all. The major obstacles facing our foster youth are the accessibility of affordable housing, medical insurance/Medicaid, education, employment, and connections to supportive adults.

Numerous states have passed legislation including, but not limited to: post-secondary education tuition waivers, Medicaid until 21 waivers, and the option for youth to remain eligible for foster care payments until the age of 21.

When a child enters the foster care system, it becomes the responsibility of the state to ensure that these youth have the opportunities to become successful, self-sufficient adults.

In conclusion, the Department of Human Services fully supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 4025.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.