

Testimony
HB 1372 – Department of Human Services
House Human Services Committee
January 20, 2009

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Julie Hoffman, Administrator of Adoption Services for the Department of Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on HB 1372.

It is our understanding that the sponsors of this bill are concerned with the cost of adoption, particularly for those families who are adopting infants and those adopting internationally. Nationally, infant adoption costs are estimated to be from \$5,000 to \$40,000, and international adoption costs are estimated to be from \$7,000 to \$30,000. Adoption fees in North Dakota are generally \$8,000 to \$10,000 at a minimum, and this is not inclusive of attorney fees, facilitation fees, travel costs for the family and additional fees for the involvement of multiple agencies (as in international or interstate adoptions). Compounding this, many families exhaust their personal financial resources pursuing various infertility treatments prior to their journey into adoption.

We understand this bill would direct the Department to develop and implement a program to reimburse prospective adoptive parents for the amount expended by the prospective adoptive family for the initial preplacement adoption assessment. Implementation of this bill would have a fiscal impact as identified in the fiscal note, To estimate the fiscal impact, I surveyed all currently licensed child-placing agencies in North Dakota as to the number of initial preplacement adoption assessments they have

completed in each of the last five years and the current cost of the assessments. Please note that I did not include the adoption program that provides assessments for families adopting children from foster care, since those costs are already funded by the Department through a contract with the child-placing agency that provides the service. I averaged the number of assessments for each agency (and projected a number for those agencies that do not have a five-year history), multiplied that number by the cost and totaled for all agencies for the two year period of the biennium. I did add a 5% increase in assessments, as I believe such a program will encourage more families to pursue adoption. I also included the cost needed to develop a simple brochure and application that will be disseminated to the licensed child-placing agencies and placed them on the Department's web site for easy access. As you can see, we have projected the costs for this program to be \$691,446 for the biennium.

In discussion within the Department and with child-placing agencies, a number of questions have arisen regarding the intent of this bill, particularly regarding to whom it would apply. For example, would we reimburse families whose assessment was not recommended? What about those families who are not residents of North Dakota but are adopting a ND child? Would we consider family income and resources at all in the reimbursement? Would the reimbursement be effected by other sources of adoption support (i.e. the adoption tax credit, employee adoption support programs, or adoption grant programs)? Would there be a cap to the amount of reimbursement? Because of these questions and if this bill were to move forward, it would be helpful if the committee would give us guidance in regard to these questions so that the Department is able to move forward in implementing this program.

Thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time, or to provide additional information as you may need.