

**Testimony**  
**Department of Human Services**  
**Human Services Interim Committee**  
**Representative Chuck Damschen, Chairman**  
**July 22, 2014**

Chairman Damschen, members of the Human Services Interim Committee, I am Shari Doe, Children and Family Services Division Director for the Department of Human Services (DHS). I appear before you to provide information regarding behavioral health services provided to children in foster care, including where the services are provided.

Every child entering foster care receives a Health Tracks screening. This screening is a comprehensive look at the child's health including a mental health screening. Children identified with potential behavioral health needs are referred to the appropriate provider. Foster children then access care through private providers or through the human service centers. Behavioral health care is Medicaid reimbursable to those providers with Medicaid provider agreements.

Children in North Dakota who are placed within the foster care system are provided and have access to the same behavioral health services available to other children in North Dakota. These services may include: individual therapy, addiction treatment, *Partnerships* child mental health case management, group therapy, family therapy, and intensive in-home therapy services. For children placed in a family foster home setting, services are generally provided in the community. While limited access to and availability of mental health services in certain parts of the state create difficulties for county staff and families by having to travel long distances to

access behavioral health services for a child, availability and distance to services is an issue that affects all children equally.

For children placed in out of home treatment facilities, a Residential Childcare Facility (RCCF) or a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF), behavioral health services are part of the care the children are provided while in placement. In some instances these services are provided on-site in the facility, and in some cases they are sought in the community as they would be for other children who need the service.

Access and availability of behavior health care is critical for foster children and their families. In a recent review of North Dakota data on children in foster care from October 1, 2013, to March 30, 2014 - approximately 42% of those children entered care because of the parent's mental health or addiction.<sup>1</sup> Behavioral health services for the parents of foster children must also be part of any care plan developed for a child in foster care. When those services are delayed or, in some cases, not available, family reunification is also delayed.

For the children in family foster homes, access to behavioral health care is the same as it would be for any child in North Dakota. Availability and distance to services affect all children equally.

Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to answer questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), 2014 A submission