

Testimony
House Bill 1089 – Department of Human Services
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Lee, Chairman
February 19, 2013

Senator Lee, members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Alex C. Schweitzer, Director of Field Services for the Department of Human Services. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 1089, introduced at the request of the Department of Human Services (Department).

House Bill 1089 would remove the limitation that only two nursing homes within the state may operate a unit that provides geropsychiatric services. The changes identified in this bill would give the Department the ability to respond to an increased need for geropsychiatric services in the future.

Nursing home residents that require geropsychiatric services are individuals that have a diagnosis of a mental illness, have behavioral issues that require ongoing maintenance, and need assistance with self-care. The need for specialized geropsychiatric units in nursing facilities grew out of the admission of nursing facility residents to the North Dakota State Hospital (NDSH) due to mental health, behavioral, and self-care needs, who after treatment, were not accepted back to community nursing homes. This is understandable, as community nursing homes don't have the specialized environment, staffing levels, and training to address the needs of these geropsychiatric individuals.

Currently, the Sheyenne Care Center in Valley City operates a 32-bed geropsychiatric service unit within their nursing facility. That unit has been consistently at 100 percent capacity in the past 24 months. When it is full, the NDSH often becomes the sole alternative for geropsychiatric services, and often because of patient need and cost, this is not an appropriate setting. The Department issued an informal request for proposal for an additional geropsychiatric unit within a nursing facility in September 2012. The Department entered into an agreement with the Prince of Peace Nursing Home in Ellendale to open a second unit of 16 beds for geropsychiatric services in November 2012. The anticipated opening date of this unit is July 2013.

The criteria that is used in selecting a nursing facility to provide geropsychiatric services is based on the suitability of the building and environment, admission and discharge criteria, staffing level and experience, overall program goals, quality assurance measures, and the experience and qualifications to care for individuals with unique behavioral and nursing care needs.

The budgeted average daily rate in a geropsychiatric unit for the 2013-2015 biennium is \$225.31. This is compared to the budgeted average daily rate for North Dakota nursing facilities for 2013-2015 of \$215.31. The average daily rate at the NDSH is \$386.98.

The Department supports passage of this bill to assure that the Department has the flexibility to respond to increased need for geropsychiatric services in the future. The only alternative when the community geropsychiatric units are full is the NDSH.

The NDSH provides short-term acute inpatient psychiatric and substance abuse treatment. Although, a person needing geropsychiatric services may require a short stay at the NDSH for intensive treatment, a longer term stay is not in their best interests. In addition, the cost of the NDSH is higher than a community geropsychiatric facility.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.