

Testimony
Senate Concurrent Resolution 4025
Representative Price, Chair
House Human Services Committee
March 20, 2007

Chair Price and members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Dawn Pearson; I am the State Independent Living 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, some of 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, the accessibility of affordable housing, medical insurance/Medicaid, education, employment, and connections to supportive adults continue to be major obstacles for youth aging out of foster care in our state. Our state's Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides opportunities for some youth, however this study would allow the opportunity for the Legislature to explore additional possibilities for expanding upon the resources and programming currently available.

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

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