

**Testimony**  
**Senate Bill 2174 –Department of Human Services**  
**House Human Services Committee**  
**Representative R. Weisz, Chairman**  
**March 3, 2009**

Chairman Weisz, and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am JoAnne Hoesel, Director of the Division of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Division and Developmental Disabilities Division for the Department of Human Services. I am here today to provide information on services provided and planned in the area of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) by or through the Department of Human Services (DHS).

The Department, through its developmental disabilities (DD) and mental health areas, has been involved in ASD issues since the mid 90s. This area is rapidly changing, highly emotional, and ripe with differences of opinion.

In the area of mental health, over 186 children with pervasive developmental disabilities, a type of disorder on the autism spectrum, were served at the regional human service centers in state fiscal year 2008. The state's wraparound process for children and adolescents with emotional disturbances and in need of intensive care coordination began in 1994. A significant number with ASD are served by this program. DHS licenses group homes, residential child care facilities, psychiatric residential treatment facilities, child and adult foster homes, waiver services including DD group homes and individuals with ASD are served throughout this array.

In the area of developmental disabilities, both North Dakota's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Advisory Committee and Interagency Coordinating Committee participated on an autism task force that was appointed in March 2001. The outcome of this effort was autism guidelines for both DPI and DHS' early intervention programs. The guidelines were published in March of 2003.

Currently, the Family Support Services area of developmental disabilities provides family in-home supports through structured interventions and respite. Individuals with ASD also receive services through the array of DD Medicaid waiver services. In the area of early intervention, family subsidy, Right Track, newborn screening, and Infant Development, evaluations, support families of children with ASD.

The Department works with Minot State University to coordinate services with their recently obtained federal grant that targets school-aged children with ASD. We are currently involved in the group that is writing a state autism plan.

The Department holds monthly state review team meetings that include mental health, substance abuse, developmental disabilities, Medicaid, education, and juvenile justice. These meetings bring a collaborative perspective to difficult situations despite valiant local and regional efforts. Many times, the team reviews individuals who have disorders on the autism spectrum and both mental health, developmental disabilities, and education systems find it difficult to provide adequate services.

The Department provides training to both developmental disabilities and mental health professionals. An autism spectrum expert trained individuals; multi-day training for early intervention staff was held; three training sessions were offered last year with a follow-up planned for the summer of 2009; autism presentations are planned for the mental health conference this spring; and the Department sponsored the attendance of several people at the Network of Autism Training & Technical Assistance Projects conference in the fall of 2008.

In preparation for this legislative session, the Department held several stakeholder meetings focused on this area to gain feedback and recommendations for focus within the Department's budgeting process. The Autism Waiver, which is funded in the Governor's budget, is a result of that feedback. This autism waiver is planned for children ages zero to five. This waiver will provide refined and targeted services for diagnosis and intensive evidence-based interventions. Early intervention plays a critical role in early diagnosis and treatment, and this waiver plans to develop a team of professionals with specialized training to diagnose and design specialized programs.

Chairman Weisz and members of the committee, as more information is learned and experience gained in the area of ASD, DHS will continue its commitment, efforts, and collaboration to support children and families in North Dakota.

I will answer any questions you may have at this time.