

Testimony
Senate Bill 2073 - Department of Human Services
Senate Judiciary Committee
Senator David Hogue, Chairman
January 13, 2015

Chairman Hogue, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am Alex C. Schweitzer, the Superintendent of the North Dakota State Hospital (NDSH) of the Department of Human Services (DHS). I am here today to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2073. This bill was introduced at the request of the Department.

In 2007, the Legislative Assembly directed the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) and the DHS, to enter into an agreement for the DOCR to provide security services for the sex offender unit located at the NDSH. The James River Correctional Center (JRCC) of DOCR provides security consultation, training, and services to the NDSH under this agreement.

The JRCC currently provides the following security services for the NDSH sex offender unit:

1. Security training consisting of over 32 hours of initial training in the first year of employment.
2. Annual half-day refresher course for all employees.
3. Consultation regarding security measures and procedures.
4. Security backup and emergency personnel in crisis situations.
5. Perimeter surveillance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

As a result of this collaborative effort between JRCC and the NDSH, security measures in the sex offender unit are greatly enhanced because of the training, consultation, and services of the JRCC.

Senate Bill 2073 proposes to expand the interagency agreement between the DHS and DOCR, to allow the DOCR to provide security services for all the service units at the NDSH. The DOCR supports this bill and is willing to amend the interagency agreement to include the expanded scope.

The NDSH continues to experience an increase in the acuity of patients in the inpatient psychiatric service. In addition, the NDSH is experiencing a dramatic increase in jail transfers and forensic admissions. These patients can present an imminent risk to other patients and staff.

The NDSH has addressed the increased acuity in a variety of ways:

- Added security staff in the adult psychiatric service.
- Expanded the number of intensive care beds in the adult psychiatric service.
- Implemented changes in procedures to minimize risk in the care environment and to increase safety for staff and patients.
- Addressed proper staffing levels.

DHS now asks for your support of Senate Bill 2073, to further enhance the NDSH safety and security efforts, by allowing JRCC to provide security services throughout the NDSH.

I would be glad to answer any questions.

