

Department of Human Services
Interim Judiciary Committee
Senator David Hogue, Chairman
April 2, 2018

Chairman Hogue and members of the Judiciary Committee, I am Tom Solberg, Deputy Director for the Department of Human Services (Department). I appear today to provide a report on the task force on the prevention of sexual abuse of children created by Senate Bill 2342.

The task force convened on March 13, 2018, in the Peace Garden Room. All members of the task force were in attendance: Senator David A. Clemens; Representative Shannon M. Roers-Jones; Representative Mary Schneider; Anna Frissell, Executive Director, Red River Children's Advocacy Center; Tom Solberg, Deputy Director for the Department; Sandra Tibke, Executive Director, Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota; Valerie Fischer, Director of Safe and Healthy Schools / Adult Education, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction; Lonnie Grabowska, Deputy Director, Bureau of Criminal Investigation; Erica Wondrasek, Administrative Officer, Judicial Systems Administrator; North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission; and Chris Johnson, Executive Director, Rape and Abuse Crisis Center of Fargo-Moorhead.

Senate Bill 2342 was reviewed to familiarize task force members with the duties and goals assigned to the task force. Ms. Anna Frissell was nominated and unanimously voted as presiding officer of the task force.

Information Provided by Task Force Members

- Role and background of the Children’s Advocacy Centers in North Dakota.
- Healthy Relationships Project which is a program from Prevent Child Abuse Vermont.
- The Rape and Abuse Crisis Center’s Red Flag Green Flag curricula in Fargo, West Fargo and Moorhead schools. Coloring books are geared toward early elementary-aged children focusing on personal safety.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs information may be helpful to determine the potential needs and costs to the state. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the incarceration of a parent or guardian.
- Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota effort called Authentic Voices, which is a group of sexual abuse survivors that acts as an advocacy group.
- Handle with Care is a pilot project promoting the collaboration of the Mandan Public Schools and Mandan Police Department with the goal of mitigating trauma for children. When law enforcement comes into a situation where a child has been exposed to stress, violence or trauma, communication is sent to school officials alerting them that the student might need extra care (a nap, food, clean clothes, etc.) and possible services wrapped around the child. Discussion is underway to expand to other cities.

Public Comment

Rep. Bernie Satrom (Senate Bill No. 2342 co-sponsor) expressed how pleased he was about the task force and the collective knowledge and

passion everyone was bringing to the effort. He stated we have the opportunity to make changes to break the generational cycle.

Marlys Baker, Child Protection Services Administrator for the Department shared data on child protection services in North Dakota. She said the state data does not include tribal or law enforcement data. Each North Dakota tribe has its own child welfare data system to report child abuse and neglect. Ms. Baker also shared information about these national initiatives.

- Pass the Trash laws require schools to provide information when contacted by other schools requesting employment records of past school employees. Many states are exploring these laws.
- People in an official capacity in amateur sports can be designated as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect. Legislation is being heard in many states.
- Twenty six other states have convened task forces similar to the task force created by Senate Bill No. 2342.

Ms. Baker also talked about the Alliance for Children's Justice, which has worked for the prevention of child abuse and neglect since 1986. The Alliance is federally-funded through the department and requires maintenance of a multi-disciplinary task force to address the handling of child abuse and neglect cases, including support for legislation that addresses abuse and neglect of children. She also said children with sexual behavior problems are a concern for the child welfare system. It is difficult to find facilities that are equipped with the right resources to meet their needs and keep the children safe. Children may end up being placed in an out-of-state facility.

Plans to meet goals

Ms. Frissell led a review of what data/outcomes will be brought to the next task force meeting:

- North Dakota State Penitentiary data
- Data from Children's Advocacy Centers
- Tribal data
- Law enforcement data
- Red Flag Green Flag outcomes/measures
- ACEs data
- Curriculum used for teacher training (DPI)
- North Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey data
- The Healthy Relationship Project

Members were encouraged to submit names of people who might be willing to give presentations at future meetings.

Representatives Roers-Jones and Schneider will request Legislative Council conduct background work on efforts other states are working on regarding the prevention of child sexual abuse and outcomes.

A schedule was established for 10 task force meetings in 2018.

This concludes my report, and I'll answer any questions you may have.