

Testimony
Senate Bill 2114– Department of Human Services
House Human Services Committee
Representative Robin Weisz, Chairman
February 15, 2017

Chairman Weisz, and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Kelsey Bless, Permanency Administrator for the Department of Human Services (Department); Children and Family Services Division. I am here today in support of Senate Bill 2114, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

North Dakota Century Code chapter 27-20 addresses juvenile court proceedings. The proposed changes on page 2, lines 18 through 20, meet compliance with federal legislation “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act” (P.L. 113-183) which requires states to engage earlier with young people in efforts to build their independent living skills. The proposed change will reduce the age required in foster care permanency planning from age 16 to age 14 when case managers must assist youth with goals and tasks to transition to successful adulthood.

In addition, the proposed changes on page 2, line 28, will mirror the language on page 1, lines 15 through 18, requiring sibling language be present in permanency hearings and case planning only if applicable; meaning if the child has siblings. If a child does not have siblings, case planning would not require discussions or documentation as a means to maintain family connections. Adding “if applicable” will allow for the topic to be addressed only if relevant.

North Dakota Century Code chapter 50-11 addresses foster care homes for children and adults. The Department proposes the change on page 3, line 6, to correct the definition of a group home to include the number four, allowing an agency who meets the compliance for licensing under N.D.A.C 75-03-16 Residential Child Care Facilities/Group Homes to operate as a group home if the agency has at least four, but less than thirteen beds licensed for children in need of placement.

Lastly, there are proposed changes on page 3, lines 20 through 27, related to liability coverage to foster homes for children. The Department has the ability to reimburse a licensed foster care provider if property damage is caused by acts or omissions of a foster child. The proposed changes will allow the Department limited discretion when more than \$25,000 of total damage is caused to a property. At this time, the Department can reimburse up to \$5,000 per claim with a maximum of \$10,000 per claimant per year. However, the proposed change would allow the Department to reimburse the claimant more than \$5,000 per claim if determined appropriate, but still not exceed the \$10,000 annual maximum.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.