

Testimony
Senate Bill 2246 - Department of Human Services
House Judiciary Committee
Representative Kim Koppleman, Chairman

March 5, 2019

Chairman Koppleman and members of the House Judiciary Committee, I am Pamela Sagness, Director of the Behavioral Health Division of the Department of Human Services (Department). I appear today to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2246.

The widely used general term of “detoxification” can involve management of intoxication episodes and withdrawal episodes. Adults, at various points in time, may need intoxication management or may be in need of withdrawal management. Adolescents are more frequently in need of management for intoxication episodes than management for withdrawal symptoms.

When a person’s substance use disorder has progressed to the point that physical dependence has developed, withdrawal management becomes the first (but not the sole) priority in treatment planning. The onset of a physical withdrawal syndrome can be uncomfortable and potentially dangerous. The Department licenses substance use disorder treatment programs, including programs that provide a withdrawal management level of care.

Century Code chapter 5-01-05.1 states peace officers have a responsibility to take an apparently intoxicated person to their home, the hospital, a detox center, or jail for the purposes of detoxification. With the limited number of social/medical detox providers in the state, other systems/providers (jails) are often left responsible but are not licensed or trained to provide the level of care required.

The Behavioral Health Division has partnered with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the Jail Administrators group to work towards ensuring safety for intoxicated individuals by providing tools and training to ND jails regarding intoxication and withdrawal management. This training provides assistance to jails in developing policies and utilizing tools that guide care for individuals under the care of the jail.

Withdrawal management services are greatly lacking across the state. The Behavioral Health System Study published in April 2018 also noted the need for improved access to intoxication and withdrawal management services. Currently, Fargo and Grand Forks are the only communities with stand-alone withdrawal management (social detox) programs.

Jails are not best suited for withdrawal management services; however, withdrawal management capacity outside of jails needs to be built across the state before the issue of intoxicated people in jails can be addressed. This bill provides a short-term solution while services are being developed.

Senate Bill 2246 will assist county jails, like Cass County, who are being innovative in addressing intoxication or withdrawal management needs. This idea was initially brought forward by Mr. Andy Frobig, Cass County Sheriff's Office Jail Administrator, during a panel discussion in Bismarck regarding the establishment of a social detox program for this region.

This concludes my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions.