

**NEWS RELEASE** | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | August 4, 2021

## **Larson named director of Human Services' new Early Childhood Division**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services has selected Kay Larson to lead the department's new [Early Childhood Division](#), which was created in July 2021 to align and focus programs and resources on a key department priority: early childhood experiences.

"Kay is a proven, innovative leader, who is well respected by the state's early childhood community because of her extensive background and involvement in the state's early childhood system," said department Executive Director Chris Jones.

"I am excited about the formation of the early childhood team and grateful that Kay will be leading the team as we work to make significant impacts on North Dakota children and families," he said. "The division's purpose includes helping children realize their potential through quality early childhood experiences, supporting the state's workforce needs with improved access to child care and aligning programs for a maximum return on investment."

Most recently, Larson was the team lead for Child Care Aware of North Dakota from 2016 to 2021 for DHS and Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. Prior to that, she led professional development services for LSSND from 2007 to 2016. She has over two decades of expertise in early childhood education and services, including working in teaching and administrative positions in Head Start, Early Head Start, child care and the nonprofit sector. During her career, she has also been involved in program quality improvement, child care provider training and consultation.

Jones said the division Larson leads includes child care licensing, provider training and technical assistance, the workforce registry and quality rating and improvement systems, family support and engagement, the Best in Class grant program, administration of the Child Care Development Fund, and coordination of several data systems related to early childhood.

The structural change supporting early childhood experiences adds cohesion to services, he said. The division was created by moving programs previously housed in other DHS divisions, taking on management of several related contracts and data systems, and transitioning the Office of Early Learning from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction into DHS to form the new team as authorized in House Bill 1416.

"I am so excited to be a part of launching the Early Childhood Division and to have the opportunity to lead a talented team of professionals focused on empowering individuals and communities to strengthen quality early childhood experiences and family engagement," Larson said.

Larson has a bachelor's degree in elementary and early childhood education from the University of North Dakota.

###

### **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Heather Steffl | 701-328-4933  
[hsteffl@nd.gov](mailto:hsteffl@nd.gov)

LuWanna Lawrence | 701-328-1892  
[llawrence@nd.gov](mailto:llawrence@nd.gov)