

**TESTIMONY REGARDING  
SB 2409 ABORTION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM  
INTERIM JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
NOVEMBER 14, 2005**

Chairperson Delmore, members of the Interim Judiciary Committee, I am John Hougen, Director of Public Assistance of the Department of Human Services (DHS). I am here today to report on the implementation of SB 2409, the Abortion Alternatives Program.

DHS was given the responsibility to establish an alternative to abortion service program in North Dakota. The legislature requested that DHS seek funds from the federal office of faith based and community initiatives for this project. Contact was made with the director of this agency. Funds were available for just two purposes; abstinence programs or grants to agencies that would provide technical assistance to faith based or community based programs interested in applying for federal funds.

With no other funds being available, TANF funds will be used to fund this effort. The Charitable Choice provisions in TANF will govern the administration of this program. There are two ways to fund this program. A direct method would be to issue contracts to agencies delivering the service. An indirect method is to provide vouchers to individuals needing the service. These vouchers can be used to access the service and allow the agency delivering the service to bill DHS. The indirect method was determined to be the best way to administer this program.

The primary advantage of this indirect method is that it will allow all present providers of this service to be reimbursed. Another advantage is that with direct funded services, DHS would be obligated to make alternative services available to recipients if they object to the "religious character" of a program. With indirect

**funding, the recipient is making the choice of the service provider, and while DHS is still obligated to have alternative providers available, allowing all present providers access to reimbursement assures that there are alternative providers.**

**DHS has contacted all agencies now providing abortion alternative services. These agencies have been partners in developing this program. They were all invited to a meeting in Bismarck on November 2, 2005. Attendance at this meeting was not a condition of being eligible for reimbursement for services. The meeting was well attended and we were able to review program rules, start the development of a Memo of Understanding that would be signed by the participating providers, discuss reimbursement amounts and the reimbursement process and talk about program evaluation.**

**Two representatives from the Mental Health Association were also at this meeting. We plan to use the 211 hotline to direct referrals to the abortion alternatives program. We would develop a script for the Mental Health Association to use every time they get a call regarding an unplanned pregnancy. Included in the script will be a question about where they live, allowing the 211 worker to direct them to an abortion alternative provider in their area.**

**We do not anticipate difficulties in getting the abortion alternative program set up before January 1, 2006. The agencies now providing this service agree in principal to what we are proposing and our method of funding the service. The Memo of Understanding will be ready to sign in December of 2005 and vouchers should be ready for distribution by the end of December 2005.**

**Attached to this testimony is a draft copy of the voucher to be used for reimbursement. In addition to the billing portion, this draft contains information that needs to be made available to all program participants.**

**It would be my pleasure to respond to any questions.**