

**HB 1307 – Department of Human Services
Testimony
Department of Human Services
Judiciary Committee
Senator, Nething, Chairman
March 7, 2011**

Chairman Nething and members of the Judiciary Committee, I am Pamela Sagness, Prevention Administrator with the Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services. I am here today to provide testimony about concerns regarding HB 1307.

The original premise of this bill appears to have been to provide a location for families to eat in rural communities that lack eating establishments other than premises that serve alcohol. However, as the bill currently is written, it not only accomplishes this intent, but includes all communities – rural and urban and throws open the liquor establishment's doors to unaccompanied minors without any time restrictions.

As currently written, underage youth in larger communities with other eating establishments available, could enter a liquor establishment to eat versus eating at a restaurant that is separated from the bar.

The bill does not contain any time limit or restriction. For example, if a 15 year old went to the bar for supper, they would be able to stay until closing. During this time, youth will observe high risk drinking and associated behaviors. Additionally, many of these establishments offer happy hour specials during high traffic times, often in the evenings, which could now involve youth being present. North Dakota ranks number 1 in binge drinking for 12 years of age and older. The Department is greatly concerned about the impact of this atmosphere on youth and the related message it sends.

The bill does not include language requiring a guardian or a responsible party to accompany the individual under the age of 21 into the establishment. This means that a 13 year old and their friend can enter, eat supper, and stay without supervision. This leads to questions of how the 13 year old would be monitored and how their access to alcohol would be prevented.

Environments strongly influence youth behaviors. Some of the most effective prevention strategies involve changing the environment around youth; changing risky environments to positive environments to help youth make good choices. This bill would increase exposure and access to alcohol, thus ultimately increasing risks for future problems among our youth. Without time limits, community size limits and language requiring youth be accompanied by an adult, a liquor establishment is not an environment that will help youth make good choices.

This ends my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.