

**Department of Human Services
Commission on Alternatives to Incarceration
Senator Carlisle, Chairman
April 28, 2014**

Chairman Carlisle, members of the Commission on Alternatives to Incarceration, I am Sandy Thompson, Regional Human Service Center Director for the West Central and Badlands Human Service Centers for the Department of Human Services (DHS). I am here today to testify on recruitment and retention strategies for addiction counselors employed by the Department of Human Services.

The Department operates eight regional human service centers (HSCs) and they are:

- Northwest Human Center (NWHSC) located in Williston.
- North Central Human Service Center (NCHSC) located in Minot.
- Lake Region Human Service Center (LRHSC) located in Devils Lake.
- Northeast Human Service Center (NEHSC) located in Grand Forks.
- Southeast Human Service Center (SEHSC) located in Fargo.
- South Central Human Service Center (SCHSC) located in Jamestown.
- West Central Human Service Center (WCHSC) located in Bismarck.
- Badlands Human Service Center (BLHSC) located in Dickinson.

Substance abuse services are considered a core service of the Department and are provided to adults and adolescents. Services include: care coordination/case aide services, evaluation services, social and medical detoxification services, needs-based array of primary treatment services (low intensity outpatient, intensive outpatient, day treatment, and residential treatment), residential services, and drug courts.

The regional HSCs have a total of 105.8 budgeted full-time equivalents (FTE) for substance abuse services and they are distributed by HSC as follows:

- NWHSC has 6.5 FTE.
- NCHSC has 14.9 FTE.
- LRHSC has 10.6 FTE.
- NEHSC has 14.5 FTE.
- SEHSC has 28.5 FTE.
- SCHSC has 10 FTE.
- WCHSC has 18.2 FTE.
- BLHSC has 5.6 FTE.

The HSCs currently have twelve open addiction counselor positions and the openings by HSC are:

- 3 openings at NWHSC.
- 2 openings at NCHSC.
- 1 opening at NEHSC.
- 2 openings at SEHSC.
- 2 openings at SCHSC.
- 2 openings at the BLHSC.
- No openings at LRHSC or WCHSC.

As can be noted from above data, of the twelve open addiction counselor positions, seven of the openings are in the oil patch regions of North Dakota.

The Department has instituted the following recruitment and retention strategies to address the issue of the shortage of addiction counselors:

- Providing recruitment bonuses for new hires.
- Paying moving expenses for new hires.
- Utilizing the Addiction Technician classification, which allows new hires to complete their internship hours and move toward licensure as an addiction counselor.
- Contacting new applicants to assist them with the initial licensure and reciprocity process.
- Requesting internship program funding for addiction trainees.
- Making recruitment visits to Minnesota training programs.
- Assuring we have supervisors for the addiction trainee consortiums in North Dakota.
- Providing temporary salary increases for addiction counselors who provide supervision to trainees.
- Providing retention bonuses for current staff.
- Reducing accountable care hour requirements for staff providing supervision.
- Reviewing compensation and classifications for all addiction counselors.
- Training through the "Tuition Reimbursement Program".

The Department is currently implementing other strategies to address the current shortage of addiction counselors at regional HSCs, including:

Northwest Region:

- Contracting with a private provider in the Northwest region to provide 40 hours per week of addiction coverage at the NWHSC.

North Central Region:

- Recruiting counselors to live in Minot and providing tele-health addiction services from Minot to Williston, because of the difficulty in recruiting addiction counselors for the Northwest region.

Badlands Region:

- Sending one licensed counselor from WCHSC to the BLHSC.
- Contracting with a private provider to cover WCHSC.
- Providing tele-health addiction services from WCHSC to the BLHSC.
- Hiring an addiction counselor trainee.
- Seeking a contractor in Dickinson to provide eight hours per week of service.
- Continuing the effort to recruit for the two open positions.

Statewide:

- Working on instituting walk-in clinics in all regions, in order to increase access and reduce no-shows.
- Working with the Board of Addiction Counselors to ensure the supply of addiction counselors.

Addiction services are an important core service to the communities served by the Department and we will continue to explore ways to support the retention and recruitment of licensed addiction counselors.

I would be glad to answer any questions.