

**Testimony  
Human Services Committee  
Representative Kathy Hogan, Chairman  
January 5, 2016**

Chairman Hogan and members of the Human Services Committee, I am Trisha Page, Autism Coordinator for the Department of Human Services, within the Medical Services Division. I appear before you to provide an update on the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) voucher program pilot project.

The voucher program went into effect on July 1, 2014, as approved during the 2013 legislative session. The individuals served by the voucher program are families with an income below 200% of the federal poverty level that have a child with an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis who is between the ages of three years to 18 years. The 2015 legislative assembly authorized 10 additional voucher slots to bring the total number of voucher slots to 53.

Families interested in voucher program assistance submit the voucher application. The household income is verified by department staff and if the household income is within income guidelines, an approval letter is sent giving the household a purchase request form to complete. The completed purchase request must be submitted with an appropriate professional recommendation and confirmation of an ASD diagnosis. The requested items are then verified as relevant and appropriate purchases, and then the purchase is made for the family.

When a family is approved for the autism voucher program, they are given three purchase options. Since each qualifying child is eligible for

up to \$12,500 a year, families can make one of the following three choices:

1. They can choose a one-time item(s) purchase. This would mean that the family is looking to make a single purchase of merchandise (such as a weighted blanket, pressure vest, parent training event) and they do not intend to use any further voucher dollars.
2. They can choose to use voucher funds for on-going services. If a family selects this option, it would be for a reoccurring service (such as respite care, on-going parent training, or tutoring) that would continue until the annual voucher amount has been exhausted or the voucher fiscal year ends.
3. They can choose both the single item purchases and the on-going services.

If a family chooses the first option, they can make purchase requests up to the full \$12,500, but if they do not need to use the full amount, the dollars can be released into the voucher pool to be accessed by another, approved applicant.

If a family chooses options two or three, the full \$12,500 will be obligated for that family. If a family was to go six months without using the voucher funds and all voucher slots are full, reminders to the family would be issued in months three and five, and if the funds are not utilized, the remaining funds would be released into the voucher pool for other families to access.

If a family decides that they would like to make an additional purchase after their "one time purchase" or an inactive voucher user would like to access the funds at a later date within the same fiscal year, they do not need to apply again within that same fiscal year. Families would contact the autism services staff to resubmit another purchase request form and provide the required professional recommendation(s).

Requests or interests in purchases include autism-specific camps, tutoring, tracking devices, sensory processing equipment, communication devices, and respite care to avoid out of home placement.

The application for the autism voucher is available online at [www.nd.gov/dhs/autism](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/autism). Applications can be submitted online, emailed to autism services staff, or printed and returned by mail or by fax. Efforts are being made to ensure families know about the program. This is occurring through a number of presentations to an array of different organizations, as well as discussions with a number of private agencies.

Agencies are also taking an interest in the voucher program, as they have recognized this opportunity to help the families they serve who cannot otherwise afford or access the types of supports and services that are made available through the voucher program.

Since July 1, 2015, 55 voucher applications have been received. Two applications were denied because the family did not meet income criteria. Of the 55 applications, 43 families have met the income criteria and 41 are actively being served. One of the 43 children

discontinued services due to an out of home placement and one dropped out of the voucher program due to transitioning onto the Developmental Disability Medicaid Waiver. The remaining 10 applications are awaiting income verification.

As the autism spectrum disorder voucher program pilot project continues to unfold, DHS has seen a growing interest from families and agencies for the support of the program. The items and services requested are meeting a wide array of needs that are as varied as the spectrum disorder itself. As word continues to spread and applications continue to come in, this is quickly becoming a successful program in the autism community.

Thank you for your time and I am available for questions.