

Testimony
Senate Bill 2012 – Department of Human Services
Senate Appropriations
Senator Holmberg, Chairman
January 19, 2015

Chairman Holmberg, and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I am Trisha Page, the state autism coordinator for the Department of Human Services. I am here today to provide an overview of the programs and services that make up the budget request for the Autism Service Division (ASD).

Programs

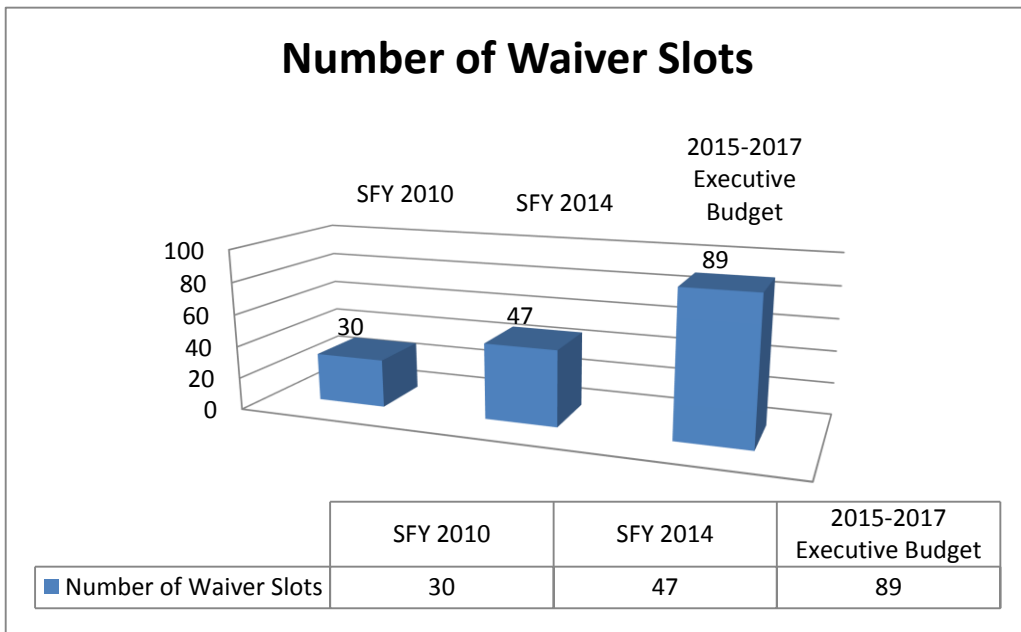
This area of the budget includes funding for the administration and operation of 1) the autism waiver, 2) the autism voucher program, and 3) the statewide autism training program.

Autism Waiver

Effective June 1, 2014, the autism waiver was approved to expand the number of slots from 30 to 47 and increase the ages served by two years. This increased the age range from birth through age five to birth through age seven. These changes required amending the waiver and gaining approval from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare (CMS). The amended waiver is now more evidence-based. As part of these changes, the Department transitioned the Autism Spectrum Disorder Waiver program out of the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Division into the ASD.

As of June 1, 2014, the waiver consists of five major components grounded in the science of behavioral intervention: 1) Service Management, 2) Program Design and Monitoring, 3) Skills Training, 4) Respite Care, and 5) Assistive Technology. Waiver components are provided by 15 private agencies. Each of these components is individualized based on an annual review of the child’s level of support needs.

As of December 31, 2014, 36 children are receiving services through the waiver, and three additional children started services January 1. As of January 1, there were an additional 35 applications pending availability of open slots. Once a total of 47 children are approved for the waiver, there will be a waiting list, which is anticipated to begin later this month or February 2015.



The Executive Budget adds 42 additional slots and increases the age range from birth through age nine. Once approved by CMS, additional children will be served through the waiver. The 2015-2017 Executive Budget is based on these new slots and the increased age being effective December 1, 2015, for a total of 89 slots.

Autism Voucher Program

The voucher program was created by 2013 HB 1038 and is designed to fill gaps in services and supports that families with a child with an autism diagnosis are missing. The voucher program began taking applications from families in July 2014, and is currently the only voucher program of its kind in the United States.

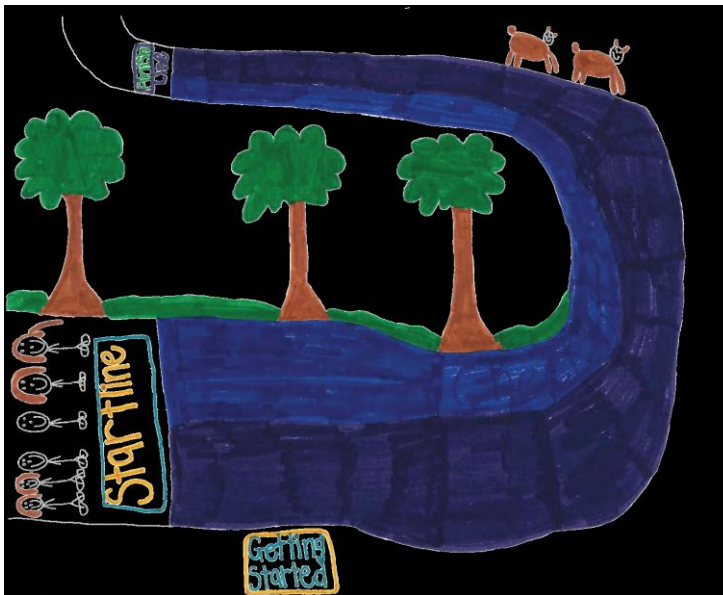
With the funding provided by the 2013 legislative assembly, the voucher program provides up to a maximum amount of \$12,500 per qualifying child per year, for children over the age of three but under the age of 18 with an autism diagnosis and who are in a household with an income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Vouchers can be used to purchase non-therapy supports such as respite care, communication devices, tutoring, parent education support, and many other items and services that families are typically unable to obtain in an effort to overcome the debilitating qualities that autism can present. As of December 31, 2014, 26 applications have been received and all but four have been approved.

Statewide Autism Training Program

The autism training program includes efforts to create an awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorders and also to educate people on recognizing and supporting individuals with autism.

With a current federal estimated rate of occurrence for Autism Spectrum Disorders at 1:68 for children, a need to have parents, teachers, doctors, and qualified professionals able to recognize, understand, treat, and diagnose autism has never been greater. The Department sponsored the 1st Annual Autism Spectrum Disorders conference in Bismarck in October 2014. Attendance at the conference was overwhelming, with over 350 participants. There were over 40 presenters from all over the country, including world renowned researchers and interventionists. There is a second annual conference being planned for Fargo in 2015.



The image for the 1st annual Autism Spectrum Disorders conference was chosen via an on-line voting art contest.

The art piece chosen was from Grant F., who lives in Grafton and has autism.

In addition to the conference, training dollars are being used to engage in supporting teachers, parents, and school staff through specialized school trainings, working with multiple programs to engage and train law enforcement and first responders, reaching out to physicians in offering continuing education opportunities, as well as working toward creating an autism awareness day statewide in April 2015.

Program Information

The autism coordinator position was developed to be the point of contact in the state for autism services and information.

Families are requesting support for independent living, transition, Individual Education Plans (IEP), elopement and safety support, and to assist with children in foster care. Many families are looking for support and need information on service access.

Professional and parent briefings are held monthly to listen to needs and opportunities, and to communicate updates on the autism programs and services.

In addition, a website has been developed that provides information and resources.

<http://www.nd.gov/dhs/autism/index.html>

Overview of Budget Changes

Description	2013-2015 Budget	2015-2017 Executive Budget	Increase/(Decrease)
Salary and Wages	194,248	346,826	152,578
Operating	463,368	490,341	26,973
Grants	3,418,440	7,718,026	4,299,586
Total	4,076,056	8,555,193	4,479,137
General Fund	2,303,910	5,129,218	2,825,308
Federal Funds	1,772,146	3,425,975	1,653,829
Total	4,076,056	8,555,193	4,479,137
Full Time Equivalent	1.0	2.0	1.0

Budget Changes from Current Budget to the Executive Budget:

The Salary and Wages line item increased by \$152,578 and can be attributed to the following:

- \$26,872 in total funds, of which \$16,504 is general fund, needed to fund the Governor's compensation package.
- \$3,376 in total funds, of which \$1,952 is general fund, needed to sustain the employee increases approved by the last Legislative Assembly.
- \$153,703 increase, of which \$101,442 is general fund, for an administrative staff officer position to support the autism coordinator by providing timely responses to families and tracking and analyzing program data.
- \$31,373 decrease due to the autism coordinator position hired at rate lower than budgeted.

The Operating line item increased by \$26,973 and is mainly attributed to the following:

- Increase of \$23,486 in Operating Fees and Services due to fiscal agent fee for the waiver being for the entire biennium.
- Increase of \$8,400 in IT Contractual Services for 62 additional children being added to the case management system.
- \$8,338 decrease in Rent due to current rental rates.

For Grant line item changes see [Attachment A](#).

The general fund request increased by \$2,825,308, of which \$2,671,423, or 95%, is related to cost and caseload changes, as well as a 4% inflationary increase, and additional slots for the Autism grants. The remaining \$153,885, or 5% is related to salary and operating changes for the Autism Services area as described above.

The federal fund request increased by \$1,653,829 which is Medicaid funding, and is mainly attributed to the changes in the waiver.

This concludes my overview of the ASD area of the Department. I am available to answer any questions.