

Testimony
Senate Bill 2089 – Department of Human Services
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Judy Lee, Chairman
January 12, 2021

Chairman Lee, members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Krista Fremming, Assistant Director of the Medical Services Division, for the Department of Human Services (Department). I am here today in support of Senate Bill 2089, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

Section 1 of this bill amends subsection 17 of section 50-06-05.1 of the North Dakota Century Code to include updated language related to housing stabilization supports and rental assistance as it relates to the authority of the Department. This language includes an acknowledgement of the inter-agency nature of housing related work.

Section 2 of this bill repeals sections 1-02-35, 50-06-14, and 50-06-32.1 of the North Dakota Century Code.

Section 1-02-35 regarding to the date of taking effect of code is being repealed as the Code Reviser informed the Department that the section was obsolete. Section 50-06-14 relating to the financing of welfare programs is also being repealed as that section is also obsolete. The Office of Management and Budget has confirmed that this fund is outdated and has not be used for at least eighteen years, if not longer. The Department also checked with the Office of State Treasurer and they indicated that they have no record of this fund. Section 50-06-14, was last updated in 1971.

Section 50-06-32.1, covers the Autism Voucher Program and it is funded solely with state general funds. As the Department developed its 2021-23 budget and identified general fund savings, it was noted that unmatched funds from the Autism Voucher Program could be reinvested into the Medicaid Autism Waiver. This allows the Department to draw down a federal match for dollars devoted to this population and increase the number of slots that can be funded through the waiver.

Eliminating the Autism Voucher Program and reinvesting these funds into the Medicaid Autism Waiver Program will result in the following benefits:

- Increased number of waiver slots. Currently there are 96 slots, and the Department anticipates adding 54 slots for a total of 150 slots.
- Access to more services. Children who participate in the waiver also have access to all Medicaid covered services, not just autism waiver services.
- Access to a service manager. All children who participate in the autism waiver have a service manager, who helps to coordinate their services and care.
- Deduplication of services. Many of the services and items that were covered under the voucher program can be covered under the autism waiver, including respite care and assistive technology, two of the most frequently requested items.
- More appropriate services. Under the autism voucher the Department often gets requests for services or items that are not appropriate. Examples of some of these items are a car, cable television subscription, subscription to home food delivery program, a complete kitchen set, etc. Often these requests are denied by the Department and subsequently sent to an administrative law judge for adjudication by families.

- Federal matching dollars through the waiver will reduce the state general fund expenditures for autism programs.
- Administrative simplification for the Department. Department staff will be able to focus on one program rather than two programs with different rules and requirements.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.