

Testimony in Support of SB 2131

January 20, 2021

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Paula Condol. I am the Executive Director of the Dakota Children's Advocacy Center. I am accompanied today by, Greg Kasowski, the Executive Director of the Children's Advocacy Centers of North Dakota. Our North Dakota CACs include my Dakota CAC, with offices located in Bismarck and Dickinson, Northern Plains CAC, in Minot and Bottineau, and the Red River Children's Advocacy Center, in Fargo and Grand Forks.

I am before the Committee today to offer testimony in support of SB 2131.

Our North Dakota Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) work to ensure that every child who is the victim of abuse in North Dakota has access to a multidisciplinary team of professionals to investigate and intervene on behalf of the child. We strive to ensure our Centers are a safe place for children and youth to share what happened to them, and to receive medical, advocacy and mental health services.

SB 2131 allows our CACs to conduct fingerprint background checks on our employees, volunteers, and others who interact with minors under the age of 18.

CACs have always been aware of the need to ensure a safe environment and to protect the children who come to us. Traditionally, we have either relied on a recent background check from another agency, or we order our own local and state background checks, as well as requesting a review of the child abuse registry.

Our accrediting body, the National Children's Alliance, informed us recently that our federal funding requirements had changed to now require *fingerprint* background checks on any professional who comes in contact with children at our Centers. We rely on federal funding to continue operating and providing services to kids. We knew we needed to meet the fingerprint background check requirement immediately or lose federal funding.

We attempted to meet this requirement by first contacting the Bureau of Criminal Investigations, local agencies, even national agencies. However, they either do not offer fingerprint background services, or our organization does not qualify for fingerprint background services.

Under SB 2131, NDDHS can submit a request to the Bureau of Criminal Investigation on our behalf and we can receive a fingerprint background check.

We are small agencies. We anticipate there will be fewer than 30 requests for fingerprint background checks per year. This bill solves a problem for CACs and helps us make our workplaces safer for children and families.

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.