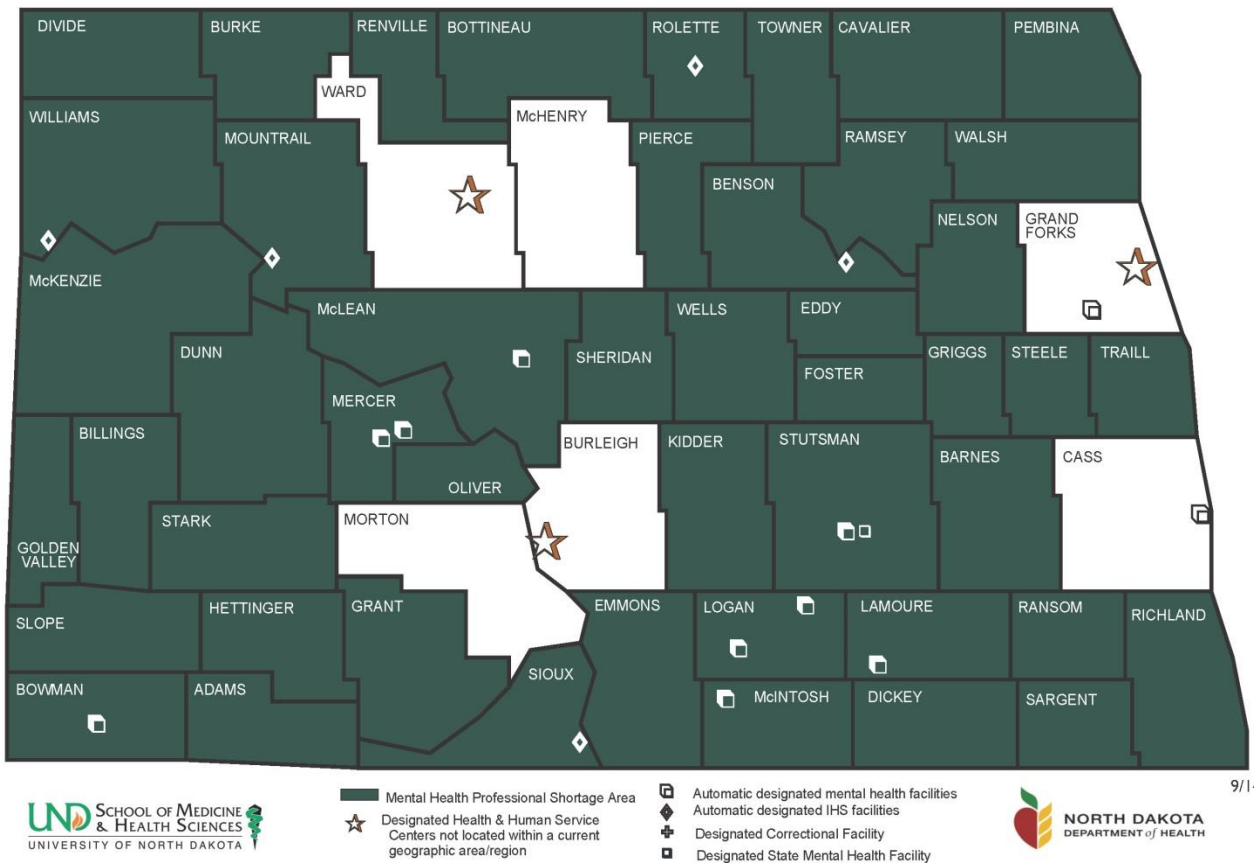


Testimony
House Bill 1115
House Human Services Committee
Monday, January 12, 2015; 10:30 a.m.
North Dakota Department of Health

Good morning Chairman Weisz and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Mary Amundson, representing the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) as Director of the Office of Primary Care. I am here today to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1115.

House Bill 1115 creates a new chapter of the North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) to establish a state loan repayment program for behavioral health professionals. Currently 96 percent (51/53) of the counties are partially or fully designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA).

North Dakota Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas



These HPSAs are mostly based on the ratio of psychiatrists to the population. According to North Dakota Board of Medical Examiners licensure data, as of January 2015, only the cities of Dickinson, Minot, Bismarck, Devils Lake, Jamestown, Grand Forks, Fargo and West Fargo are listed as having psychiatrists. Eighty-seven percent of the counties in North Dakota (46/53) have no practicing psychiatrists. Currently 44 vacancies for mental/behavioral health providers exist just within the Department of Human Services. The growing population in Western North Dakota and the disruption of service caused by the closing of some mental health inpatient services at area hospitals has placed a strain on behavioral health services. The goal of establishing this new chapter of NDCC is to place behavioral health care professionals in the areas of greatest need. Loan repayment is an incentive that has proven to be helpful in recruiting health care providers to serve in rural and underserved areas of the state.

The program would extend a maximum loan repayment of \$90,000 to be paid over a two year period for a clinical psychologist. Additionally, the program would allow for a maximum loan repayment of \$60,000 to be paid over a two year period to the following professionals practicing in behavioral health:

- Licensed social worker
- Licensed professional counselor
- Licensed addiction counselor
- Advanced practice registered nurse
- Registered nurse
- Specialty practical nurse
- Licensed practical nurse

To be eligible for the program, the behavioral health professional must be a graduate of an accredited program located in the United States or Canada, must be licensed or registered to practice in this state in the behavioral health profession for which the applicant is applying, and must commit to a minimum of two years of service in the community in which they have submitted their application to serve.

Priority will be given to applicants who have graduated from an accredited program located in the state or are North Dakota residents who graduated from an accredited program in another state or Canada, and who will be practicing in a community that has a population of not more than 15,000.

The fiscal impact of this legislation is dependent upon the number of recipients selected by the State Health Council to participate in the program, which is further dependent upon the amount appropriated each Legislative Session.

The current Executive Budget for the NDDoH contained in House Bill 1004 includes an appropriation of \$495,000. This amount will provide funding for one participant each year of the biennium for a clinical psychologist at an overall expense of \$135,000 along with 4 participants each year of the biennium for the remaining disciplines at an overall expense of \$360,000.

This concludes my presentation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.