

Testimony  
Children's Behavioral Health Task Force  
Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Chair Jones and members of the Task Force, I am Tara Lea Muhlhauser, Project Coordinator for the North Dakota Children's Caucus (NDCC). Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Platform Positions and Strategy Statements today.

The North Dakota Children's Caucus recently received a small grant from the Bush Foundation (a Community Innovations Award) to begin work on re-establishing the Caucus. North Dakota Children's Caucus was founded in 1987 (and a number of the original members are here today as part of the current Working Group). The organization closed their doors in 2009.

The interest in this "reboot" came forward as a grass-roots effort to form a state-wide organization that would provide information and voice to issues central to children's well-being. Our mission is to amplify and draw attention to these issues and voices by working to create a core of citizens ready to talk about children's issues in neighborhoods, communities, in state-wide planning and policy making, in legislative venues and in other places where convening and decision-making takes place. Collaboration and conversation with stakeholders and elected and appointed officials are strong values in this process, as well as educating and using data to provide information.

Our past work in this area was very successful, and we plan to use that experience and platform to provide information and shape our citizen core. As we build this new process, we are committed to providing good information and data, creating forums to give opportunity to discuss and voice issues, seeking

expert-infused ideas and plans. We also fully intend to engage youth and diverse community members as part of our citizen core.

Prevention, and access to resources for all children (and families) who have been maltreated and harmed is a very important priority for us. As all the data indicates, both in our state and across the country and world, early trauma creates a path for the child (and often family) with many negative outcomes. We will advocate for systems to embrace prevention (all levels-primary, secondary and tertiary) to coordinate, collaborate, and provide resources for treatment for these children, youth, and families.

The work you have introduced to us through your platform is comprehensive and visionary. We applaud the diversity of strategies to meet the challenges you identified. We join you in support of this approach and commit to working with you to assure that each and every child and family in our neighborhoods, community and state are included in building strategic and accessible services and processes to address identified needs.

School safety, suicide prevention, prevention of bullying, understanding brain development and trauma, renewed commitment to work toward child maltreatment policy and law, services and expertise to strengthen and grow early intervention programs and prevention programs, services for substance exposed infants and their families, and access to emergency care are all very important issues. We note that these are not new issues-they have been at the table for some time and we have often been frustrated in moving forward because of lack of resources. But with the emphasis you bring to these issues, we hope this will be a new day so that we can confidently agree to commitment and collaboration to make change in these areas.

Two of the platform issues, state tribal service coordination and a state-level Children's Services Committee are of special interest to the ND Children's Caucus. Clearly, we need a strong policy for, and commitment to embrace government-to-government relationships when considering the family and community needs to keep children safe and their families involved to secure daily needs and access to services.

Developing and sustaining the former Children's Services Coordinating Committees across the state was very important and successful work the ND Children's Caucus was involved in from the inception, both members individually and collectively as an organization. We are ecstatic to join in this movement to bring back a very respected and successful body of work and innovation about how we communicate and collaborate with one another child-by-child, family-by-family and community-by community. This is our legacy for the future of citizens in our state.

Finally, and may we not forget, ND has been named the #1 state for economic prosperity in the country according to ND KidsCount (and the national KidsCount program). We must continue to ponder with eyes wide open, and challenge ourselves and our institutions as we ask, "and how are the children".



NORTH DAKOTA  
Children's Caucus