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Good morning, Chairwoman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee. My name is Kim Mertz, Healthy and Safe Communities Section Director within the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health. I am here to provide information regarding two items related to Senate Bill 2127.

The first item is related to proposed eligibility changes in the behavioral health loan repayment program. In the bill, a psychiatric registered nurse has been added as an eligible health care professional on page 1, line 18 – which reads, “For a clinical psychologist ‘or a psychiatric registered nurse’”.

Eligible professionals under behavioral health include registered nurses (page 2, line 15) and specialty practice registered nurses (page 2, line 16). A psychiatric registered nurse could be included in the definition of a behavioral health professional.

The repayment amount is different between a clinical psychologist and a behavioral health professional. The loan repayment for a clinical psychologist may not exceed twelve thousand dollars per year, and may not exceed sixty thousand dollars over five years. The loan repayment for a behavioral health professional may not exceed four thousand dollars per year, and may not exceed twenty thousand dollars over five years.

Because of the differences in the repayment amounts described above, if this amendment is adopted clarification regarding the level of practice for this health care professional would be needed.

The second item is related to clarification regarding the number of years for program participation. On page 3, line 1, the completion of the number of years a participant in the student loan repayment program has been proposed to change from five years to three years.

The loan repayment obligation term in all the health care professional areas is five years. If the intent is to change the service obligation from five years to three, then the amount available per year would need to be increased.

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