November 6, 2017

SBARE  
NDSU Dept. 7520  
PO Box 6050  
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

Re: Letter of Support for NDSU Extension Service, Family and Consumer Sciences

To Whom it May Concern,

The North Dakota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division is providing this letter in support of NDSU Extension Services, Family and Consumer Sciences and their work on behalf of preventing child abuse and neglect across the state.

Since 1991, North Dakota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division and NDSU Extension Services, Family and Consumer Sciences has worked together to fulfill the mandate of North Dakota Century Code Chapter 50-06-06.10 “Family Life Education Program”. This statute requires an agreement between our two entities for the design of a program to educate and support individuals at all points within the family life cycle. Such programming to provide support for families and youth with researched-based information relating to relating to “personal, family, and community concerns and must contain a research component aimed at evaluation of planned methods or programs for prevention of family and social problems”.

The Department of Human Services also manages the federal Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grant (CBCAP), which requires interagency collaborations in forming a child abuse prevention network to promote greater coordination of resources, promotion of high quality implementation of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and practices with a focus on evaluation approaches and methods to assess the effectiveness of the funded programs and activities. Given the requirements of the CBCAP grant, and the mandate of a Family Life Education program, NDSU Extension Services was the most logical choice for effective use of the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grant funding. Working collaboratively with NDSU Extension Service, in 2000, the Parent Education Network was formed and began working to provide high quality, research informed and evidence based parenting education across the state. Today, that effort continues to support the Parent Education Network in seven of the eight service regions.

The Department of Human Services, through the Children’s Trust Fund, supports the evidence based Nurturing Parenting Program. In 2009, the Department was faced with need for new management of this program. Once again, the Department turned to NDSU Extension Service with a plea to help keep
this service alive in our state. Eight years later, under the expert guidance of the Extension Service, these programs are healthy and thriving. Along with quality programming, NDSU has provided thorough evaluation of this program. Using pre/post test data from the participants, the evaluation in 2016 indicated a 40% to 80% decrease in the risk of child maltreatment (Nurturing Parenting Program in ND: Project overview and Year-End Report for 2015-2016). A national expert remarked to me that the effectiveness data for North Dakota’s Nurturing Parenting Programs is among the best in the nation. I believe this quality and excellence is due to the expertise of NDSU Extension Service. There is strong evidence that our partnership is preventing child abuse and neglect in our state.

The DHS/NDSU Extension Service collaboration provides a continuum of primary, secondary, and tertiary preventive services for families in our state. Parent Resource Centers provide valuable services for a wide range of family struggles. From the new parent who calls with questions about her newborn infant, to the parent with questions about normal behavior for an adolescent; to the parent who is compelled by an agency or court to complete a parenting course; and the parent who needs to gain knowledge and skills so their child can return home from foster care, there is a resource for trustworthy, quality, non-judgmental support and information.

Finally, I would like to directly address the notion that the services provided by NDSU Extension Service and the county social service agencies is a duplication of services. Certainly, the legislature recognized that this is not the case when passing a law to require the two agencies to work together. One agency has expertise in pro-active family life, the other agency works with families who need this expertise. County social service agencies are charged, by law, with responsibility for child welfare services: Child Protection, Foster Care, and Protective Services Case Management, otherwise known as the Child Welfare System. These agencies are the “safety net” for abused and neglected children. County social service agency staff do not have the education, preparation, skillset or caseload that allows for educating community parents in areas such as child development, best parenting practices, or healthy family life. For this, they refer families to Parent Resource Centers and Nurturing Parenting Programs, just as they refer parents with drug problems to addiction counselors or parents will mental illnesses to mental health counselors. Conversely, NDSU Extension Service is not equipped to identify abused and neglected children, work with the court system, place children in foster care and monitor remediating services for their parents. Without Parent Resource Centers and parenting programs, such a Nurturing Parenting, there would be few to no options for parents to receive quality services in many areas of the state, resulting in more children entering the child welfare system. Parent education is a ‘fence’ between families and the ‘river’ of abuse and neglect; the child welfare system is the deep end of the pool. There is no duplication. There is a great deal of respect and collaboration, each for the role of the other.
As the administrator of the Child Protection Program for the Department of Human Services, I wholeheartedly support continuing partnership with NDSU Extension Services and urge your support for our continuing work on behalf of children and their families.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Marilyn Baker,
Administrator
Child Protection Services
Children and Family Services Division
North Dakota Department of Human Services