

Good afternoon. My name is Stacy Martin, S-T-A-C-Y M-A-R-T-I-N. I am the CEO of The Santa Fe Recovery Center, head-quartered in Santa Fe with services across the city and in Gallup.

Thank you, Chair, for inviting the New Mexico Behavioral Health Providers Association to speak on the important issues related to behavioral health provision and access across the state and particularly Northern New Mexico. As a member of this crucial Association and as today's representative, it is an honor to collaborate with colleagues across the state, and especially in Northern New Mexico where the Center serves, who, as you well know, save and transform lives every day, helping our communities become healthier and more resilient.

The New Mexico Behavioral Health Providers Association is a consortium of publicly-funded behavioral health care practitioners and organizations across the state. The Association provides behavioral health policy and education to support continuous system improvements for all of New Mexico's citizens with particular concern for historically marginalized and vulnerable populations and communities.

A strong and supportive member of the Association, the Santa Fe Recovery Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that, since 2005, has provided compassionate treatment to support people throughout their recovery from addiction, substance use, and related mental illness. An Adult Accredited Residential Treatment Center or AARTC, 79% of the Center's clients are Medicaid recipients, which means the Center serves people many other organizations will not or cannot accept based on Medicaid status and ability to pay. Roughly 36% of the people the Center serves are unhoused; this figure does not generally include individuals who are

“couch-surfing” or living with extended family members or friends. The Center’s vision of recovery for all individuals struggling with addictions means that the organization serves some of Northern New Mexico’s most vulnerable and indigent people.

Given the central focus of this legislative community hearing and your leadership in helping to combat the State’s most intransigent mental health-related issues, I will briefly outline the current service portfolio of the Recovery Center, provide some detail about the Center’s workforce, and outline areas of collective action that the Center, in partnership with the New Mexico Behavioral Health Providers Association, seeks to engage with you and your legislative colleagues in both the coming session and years ahead.

The work and mission of the Recovery Center has never been more critical. As you know, New Mexico has the fourth highest suicide mortality rate in the country, the 3rd highest drug use rate, and the highest alcohol-related deaths. In New Mexico, one in 10 adults – and one in six young adults ages 18-25 – is estimated to have a substance use disorder or SUD. Alcohol, specifically and as mentioned previously, kills New Mexicans at a higher rate than anywhere else in the country. The need for SUD treatment has never been greater. And yet, of the roughly 205,000 New Mexicans living with SUD, only 40% receive treatment. Some 60% of people who need treatment are unable to receive it for a variety of reasons including unequal access to care, especially for people in rural parts of the state, lack of transportation, financial hardship, and stigma. The Recovery Center works tirelessly to close this gap and ensure that everyone who needs access to critical SUD treatment receives quality care regardless of background, income, ability to pay, or other circumstances.

The Recovery Center works with people along the path to recovery by providing a full continuum of evidence-based care and offers individualized case management to help people navigate the many challenges the people the Center serves faces. In light of the dire need for SUD services in New Mexico, and the Center's mission to serve people in most need, it is no surprise that the Center experienced a 29% increase in admissions over the last fiscal year, admitting around 3,500 clients into detox, residential, and Intensive Outpatient, or IOP services, in fiscal year 2023. Fiscal year 2024, which began July 1, has already brought an increase over last year-to-date with a total of almost 4,000 people served in Santa Fe alone from July 1, 2022 to July 31, 2023. This number does not include the almost 1,300 telehealth encounters provided by the Center for Medication Assisted Treatment, or MAT, and IOP. The Center's service demands in Gallup are keeping pace with Santa Fe area's numbers, with an overall increase in the number of people needing the essential services the Center provides.

As one of the state's largest and most respected SUD treatment and services providers, the Recovery Center has worked diligently to increase its capacity to help meet Northern New Mexico's growing services needs. In FY2022, the Center increased its Santa Fe-based residential capacity in both men's and women's programs by 74% collectively. Men's residential program capacity grew from 23 to 36 beds and women's residential programming capacity doubled from 16 to 32 beds.

The Center's reputation for service excellence and its mission to serve everyone regardless of ability to pay encouraged the state to invite the Center to expand to Gallup in 2020 and only a year after opening the Gallup location, a street outreach program was launched. Since 2021, the outreach team in Gallup has grown to five staff members and has had tremendous success coordinating resources for community members, providing peer support and offering information about recovery services, harm reduction, relapse prevention and self-care. The team also collaborates with Gallup Indian Medical Center and First Nations Community HealthSouth to provide health education, testing, and treatment for Hepatitis C, STIs, and HIV. Through this partnership, the outreach team has facilitated testing and education for more than 350 community members.

With almost 40% of clients experiencing homelessness, housing has been a particular focus for the Center. In Santa Fe, the Recovery Center now has a total of five Bridge Houses that provide a safe environment for people in recovery to solidify their recovery and to establish a foundation on which to rebuild their lives. Last fiscal year, two houses were added – one for women and one for women and their children. While living in Bridge Houses, people served continue to receive case management and therapeutic support while finding a sense of community and purpose.

The mission of the Recovery Center would not be carried out were it not for its cadre of exceptional and committed medical and clinical staff members. The quality of service provision is equivalent to the quality of staff. In this regard, the workforce landscape is as challenging as the service landscape.

With New Mexico's overall ratio of unemployed persons per job at 0.6%, finding the kind of highly-qualified and specialized staff required to meet the demands of New Mexico's SUD and mental health needs is difficult at best. In healthcare, general occupations are expected to grow overall by more than 13% before the end of the calendar. This growth, while good from a service supply perspective, cannot be adequately accomplished given the dearth of practitioners, especially in the state of New Mexico. Add to this dire equation an average turnover rate of around 21% for behavioral healthcare nurses across the country and the current workforce and workforce development needs of New Mexico Behavioral Health Providers Association cannot be overstated.

The Santa Fe Recovery Center is no exception. The Center currently employs 191 FTEs, a full 22 fewer than required to best meet service delivery standards. About 15% of the Center's workforce is clinical licensed behavioral health staff and 10% licensed medical staff. The barriers to the recruitment and retention of licensed clinical and medical staff include supply and demand deficits -- for example, across the nation only 16.8% of all nurses practice in psychiatric and substance abuse settings -- burnout, wage and cost of living imbalance, funding for recruitment strategies, and for Northern New Mexico in particular, locations in rural communities that exacerbate difficulties in attracting candidates, especially those with young children. In coordination with the Providers Association, the Center is focusing on staff retention as a workforce priority. A singular focus on investing in new workers will not produce adequate results, as workforce increases will be nominal for the next 10 to 15 years.

New Mexico's dually challenging landscape – continued dire need for behavioral health services coupled with a commensurate workforce shortage – makes the work of the New Mexico Behavioral Health Providers Association and its partnership with legislative members of both chambers in the Round House more critical than ever. As such, the Center, as a member of the Association, seeks the following legislative advocacy aims for the next legislative session: firstly, a three-million-dollar reimbursement to behavioral healthcare organizations for clinical supervision of non-independently licensed practitioners to strengthen the behavioral health provider workforce; secondly, five million dollars for a state grant program to build behavioral health organizational infrastructure; and thirdly, 100% loan forgiveness for providers to stay in New Mexico for 5 years and to practice in rural areas.

The Center and its partners within the New Mexico Behavioral Health Providers Association cannot thank you enough for your leadership and commitment to creating solutions to meet the state's urgent mental health and its requisite workforce needs. Thank you!