

**SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS DIVISION
MARCH 12, 2025
TESTIMONY OF LONNIE GRABOWSKA
BUREAU OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION
HOUSE BILL 1003**

Chairman Wanzek and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee Government Operations Division, my name is Lonnie Grabowska and I am the Director of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation submitting testimony in support of HB1003.

Introduction

In 2023, during the 68th North Dakota Legislative Assembly, the Office of Attorney General requested funding for six new Full Time Equivalent (FTE) North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation criminal investigator positions intended to specialize in narcotics trafficking investigations on North Dakota Indian reservations. Under SB 2003, the Office of Attorney General was ultimately granted funding for three of the requested six FTE positions. The three Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions were assigned to Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, and Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The three positions were filled in 2023 and 2024.

All three agents have completed a rigorous training course and certification exam presented by the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) in order to obtain a Special Law Enforcement Commission (SLEC) through the United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Indians Affairs (BIA). According to USDOJ, SLEC agents are a “force multiplier” because they are permitted to exercise tribal, state, and federal jurisdiction during investigations of major crimes occurring in Indian Country.

The SLEC designation federally deputized each of the three agents and allows the agents to exercise the necessary jurisdiction within the boundaries of each federally recognized tribe in North Dakota that has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NDBCI. The SLEC agent jurisdiction allows law enforcement to overcome obstacles commonly presented when non-tribal law enforcement assists with the investigation of crime on tribal lands. In addition, these agents work on narcotics trafficking investigations outside reservation boundaries that identify a nexus to trafficking occurring on the reservation.

The majority of the cases worked on by these agents have pending criminal proceedings or ongoing investigations, therefore, limited details regarding specific cases can be shared at this time.

Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation (MHA Nation)

Special Agent (S/A) Breanna Leingang transferred to this position from another unit within NDBCI on May 1, 2024. Also known as the Three Affiliated Tribes (TAT), the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation (FBIR) extends across nearly one million acres and over six counties. MHA Nation operates its own tribal law enforcement, including a specialized Division of Drug Enforcement (DDE). S/A Leingang primarily partners with the MHA DDE to combat the trafficking of narcotics onto the FBIR from outside sources. The most common sources of narcotics into FBIR are offenders from out-of-state. S/A Leingang's SLEC designation has allowed federal jurisdiction to be introduced into numerous investigations. As of March 11, 2025, S/A Leingang has led or assisted in 28 investigations related to narcotics trafficking on FBIR. S/A Leingang has developed a strong working relationship with tribal law enforcement by mutually sharing intelligence, discussing operational planning, participating in tribal law enforcement-initiated enforcement operations, and resource sharing.

Case examples:

S/A Leingang assisted MHA DDE with service of a search warrant at a known narcotics trafficker's residence in New Town, North Dakota. Law enforcement located and arrested two individuals for a variety of narcotics-related offenses, including Possession with Intent to Deliver Fentanyl. Through investigation, it was determined the suspects were trafficking illicit fentanyl pills from the Minot, North Dakota, area to FBIR.

S/A Leingang assisted tribal law enforcement with an investigation involving threats of violence being made against a juvenile student resulting in tribal schools being closed to protect student safety. Through the obtaining of search warrants and further investigation with tribal and county law enforcement, the suspect was referred for criminal adjudication.

In February 2025, S/A Leingang assisted with a large, 2-day undercover narcotics operation on FBIR, resulting in six controlled buys, 13 arrests, and the seizure of fentanyl pills, methamphetamine, and cocaine.

S/A Leingang continues to collaborate with tribal law enforcement to conduct narcotics investigations with the most recent request to S/A Leingang resulting in an ongoing, multi-state investigation.

Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

Special Agent (S/A) Matthew Schimetz was hired into this position in 2023 and began his duties in October 2023. Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation (TMIR) is centered around the City of Belcourt, North Dakota. In 2022, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (TMBCI) established its own Division of Drug Enforcement to combat narcotics trafficking on TMIR. S/A Schimetz partnered with TMBCI DDE agents and worked toward developing a new, multi-jurisdictional investigative unit. In January 2025, the Northland Narcotics Task Force (NLNTF) was established and S/A Schimetz was selected as its Coordinator. Since its inception only two months ago, the NLNTF has conducted five controlled buys of narcotics. The most common sources of narcotics into TMIR are offenders from out-of-state. S/A Schimetz has worked on at least 15 cases resulting in felony-level arrests, including narcotics trafficking from out-of-state, as well as an incident involving a 14-year-old juvenile who was suspected of being potentially trafficked by a registered sex offender. S/A Schimetz continues to regularly share intelligence with tribal law enforcement and coordinate enforcement operations.

Case examples:

In February 2024, S/A Schimetz and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents conducted a joint investigation into a suspect from the Detroit, Michigan, area, suspected of trafficking illicit fentanyl pills onto the TMIR. As a result of the investigation, law enforcement seized over 14,000 illicit fentanyl pills. S/A Schimetz and other law enforcement served additional search warrants at residences within TMIR and located juveniles residing in deplorable conditions. The individuals responsible were charged with drug and child neglect offenses and were recently indicted in federal court.

In September 2024, S/A Schimetz assisted tribal law enforcement with an emergency situation involving a 14-year-old juvenile who was suspected of being potentially trafficked by a registered sex offender. The juvenile was located by law enforcement and the registered sex offender was arrested.

In October 2024, S/A Schimetz assisted tribal law enforcement with an investigation resulting from a traffic stop on the TMIR. The investigation yielded 945 illicit fentanyl pills determined to be sourced from Detroit, Michigan.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

Special Agent (S/A) Michael Wood was hired into this position in 2023 and began his duties in October 2023. Standing Rock Indian Reservation (SRIR) extends across the southern border of North Dakota and into South Dakota. SRIR is the fifth largest Indian reservation in the United States, covering over 2.3 million acres.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST) operates its own tribal law enforcement. S/A Wood has assisted the Sioux County Sheriff's Office on several investigations directly impacting victims on SRIR. The most common sources of narcotics into SRIR are offenders from out-of-state, often funneling through the Bismarck, North Dakota, area. Since beginning in his role, S/A Wood has provided training and presentations to tribal members on several occasions. S/A Wood has initiated or assisted on at least ten investigations in which narcotics trafficking was identified as occurring on SRIR or involved the distribution of narcotics intended to be trafficked on SRIR. NDBCI does not currently have an MOU in place with SRST.

Case examples:

S/A Wood and BIA agents conducted a joint investigation which resulted in the seizure of over 2,600 illicit fentanyl pills, a loaded firearm, and 109 grams of methamphetamine, and 1.9 grams of fentanyl powder. The suspect was confirmed to have distributed narcotics on the SRIR.

S/A Wood has partnered with S/A Leingang on several narcotics investigations involving the FBIR which resulted in criminal charges. S/A Wood assisted with a large, 2-day undercover operation on FBIR, resulting in six controlled buys of narcotics and 13 arrests.

On several occasions, S/A Wood has provided training to Prairie Knights Casino employees and Standing Rock High School students and faculty on the topics of narcotics and cybercrime. S/A Wood continues communication with SRST council members and law enforcement regarding a potential MOU between SRST and NDBCI.