

**Senate Judiciary Committee  
Senator Diane Larson, CHAIR  
March 19, 2025**

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**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION  
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1549**

Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am Robyn Schmalenberger, Reentry Program Manager for the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR). Today, I submit this verbal and written testimony in support of House Bill 1549.

The DOCR utilizes evidence-based practices tailored to the specific needs of individuals within the correctional system to support behavior change and successful community reintegration. Services are provided by committed corrections professionals, other state agencies and many community providers and organizations. Through collaborative efforts, significant progress has been made; however, there remain critical areas that require further attention. Specifically, there is a need to enhance reentry programs for individuals transitioning from county, regional, and tribal correctional facilities, address racial disparities, and expand access to stable housing options. House Bill 1549 directly targets these issues, aiming to strengthen the reintegration process for individuals returning to our communities.

Section 1 establishes a correctional facility grant committee and a correctional facility grant program that will provide funding for county, regional, and tribal correctional facilities. The primary aim is to expand access to evidence-based services and programming for people incarcerated in local correctional facilities that supports successful reentry. By strengthening programming options and reentry planning at the local level, we enhance the likelihood of successful reintegration, which ultimately contributes to greater public safety.

Section 2 of the bill emphasizes the importance of ensuring individuals obtain valid identification and have access to healthcare upon release. A valid ID is crucial for securing key elements of successful reentry, such as employment, education, and housing, all of which help

reduce recidivism. Access to healthcare is equally vital, as it supports individuals in managing chronic conditions, ensures continuity of care, improves overall well-being, and has a positive impact on public health. The DOCR is actively collaborating with the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Human Service Zones to ensure the successful implementation of these initiatives.

Section 3 of the bill proposes the establishment of a Native American Reentry Program. Native American individuals are disproportionately represented in DOCR facilities and under community supervision, and they experience higher rates of supervision revocation. The DOCR is aware of the need for culturally relevant services and has worked collaboratively with partners such as the South-Central Foundation and F5 to implement the Akisni Warrior Lodge (AWL) at the James River Correctional Center. AWL is a culturally based recidivism reduction program founded on the belief that change is possible, with healing encompassing the body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Building on this foundation, the proposed Native American Reentry Program would provide culturally relevant interventions, fostering better outcomes for Native American individuals. This initiative would be implemented through a collaborative approach involving the DOCR, representatives from each federally recognized tribe, and the Indian Affairs Commission, along with the designation of a Native American liaison to operate within the department regarding parole and probation services.

Section 4 directs the DOCR to create a housing task force with representation from parole and probation services, the housing finance agency, the department of health and human services, and community housing providers to address housing barriers faced by individuals on probation, parole, or those released from custody. Stable and affordable housing is a critical determinant of successful reentry, yet individuals with felony or sex offense convictions often face profound challenges in securing housing. By addressing housing barriers, we can better support individuals as they reintegrate into their communities.

This bill targets key factors that improve outcomes for individuals transitioning home. These efforts will promote successful reintegration and foster safer communities. I respectfully ask for your support of House Bill 1549. Thank you for your time and consideration. I stand for any questions.