



Chair and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Curtiss Heidebrink, and I am the Program Director of the Akisni Warrior Lodge, a groundbreaking initiative of the F5 Project operating in partnership with DOCR within the James River Correctional Center (JRCC). I am here today to offer my strong support for HB 1549, specifically its provisions to create a Native American re-entry program.

Native Americans are disproportionately represented in the North Dakota Department of Corrections. Despite making up a small percentage of the state's population, Native individuals account for a significantly higher percentage of those incarcerated. This overrepresentation is not just a statistic, it is a crisis. Many Native individuals face unique barriers both during incarceration and upon re-entry into society. Too often, gaps in resources and culturally relevant support systems leave these individuals without the tools necessary for successful reintegration. HB 1549 directly addresses these disparities by establishing a Native American re-entry program within the DOCR to work in collaboration with the five tribal nations of North Dakota and the Indian Affairs Commission. This designated program will serve as a bridge to close gaps in re-entry services, open lines of communication, and ensure that culturally responsive support is available for Native individuals.

The Akisni Warrior Lodge was founded to address many of these same concerns within the prison system. Providing justice-involved Native men with culturally responsive programming, healing, and preparation for life after incarceration. Many individuals fall through the cracks, returning to cycles of incarceration, addiction, and instability. HB 1549 will serve as a bridge, extending the kind of support provided in the Akisni Warrior Lodge, ensuring that Native men and women have access to re-entry programming tailored to meet their specific needs like cultural connections vital to their success.

This is not just about reducing recidivism; it is about restoring dignity, empowering individuals, and strengthening families and communities. The provisions in HB 1549 align directly with the mission of the Akisni Warrior Lodge, and we see this as a crucial step forward in creating opportunities in providing support for a population that so desperately needs the attention they deserve.

I urge this committee to support HB 1549 and take this necessary step in ensuring that Native individuals in incarceration are met with the resources and support they need to thrive. Thank you for your time and consideration. I'll take any questions you may have.

Curtiss Heidebrink

Akisni Warrior Lodge Program Director Akisni

F5 Project