

Testimony of Representative Lisa Finley-DeVile

In support of House bill 1549 – Senate Judiciary Committee

Chairwoman Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary committee, my name is Representative Lisa Finley- DeVile, representing District 4 A, which includes the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation. I testify in support for I am here today to express my strong support for HB 1549, which seeks to address critical gaps in North Dakota's criminal justice system by improving re-entry services, expanding access to housing, enhancing data collection, and providing culturally responsive support for Native American individuals reintegrating into society.

This bill is a necessary step toward reducing recidivism and ensuring that individuals who have served their time are given the tools they need to successfully re-enter their communities. Native people leaving incarceration have faced systemic barriers, from obtaining identification to accessing stable housing and employment. Without a stable place to live, it is nearly impossible for someone to get back on their feet. The housing task force created by this bill will work on solutions to help those on probation or parole find housing, making it easier for them to hold jobs and stay on the right path. Expanding access to housing assistance and increasing the availability of sober and low-barrier housing will make a real difference.

Many correctional facilities, especially in tribal and rural areas, do not have strong re-entry, education, or counseling programs. This bill provides grant funding to expand these programs where they are needed most. By prioritizing facilities that currently lack services, it ensures that resources go where they will have the greatest impact.

Effective policymaking requires accurate data and HB 1549's provisions on data collection and sharing will allow policymakers to track trends, measure program outcomes, and improve coordination across agencies. The ability to analyze criminal justice data more effectively will lead to smarter investments in re-entry programs and improved public safety outcomes.

HB 1549 is a necessary approach to criminal justice reform in North Dakota. By addressing gaps in re-entry support, housing, and data collection, while also ensuring that Native American individuals have access to culturally competent services, this bill strengthens our justice system and communities alike. I ask the Senate Judiciary Committee to bring this bill across the line and give it a do pass recommendation. Thank you for your time and consideration.