



NORTH DAKOTA

Family Alliance LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2220

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Good morning, Madam Chair Larson and honorable members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Mark Jorritsma, and I am the Executive Director of North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action. I am testifying on behalf of our organization in support of Senate Bill 2220 and respectfully request that you render a “DO PASS” on this bill.

Violating and taking the innocence of a child is simply evil, and I doubt any of you would disagree with that sentiment. Human trafficking, prostitution, and commercial exploitation of children (hereafter referred to simply as trafficking) do just that, and they are inextricably linked. However, as in many other cases of law, the question becomes, what do we do to stop it?

There are multiple elements to stopping trafficking, including sentencing guidelines, judicial processes, education for victims and others involved in these situations, and other facets. While NDFALA is working on all these aspects and more, we believe that law enforcement training is a critical part of the solution. The ability of law enforcement to appropriately address these situations is important to ensure that the victims obtain adequate and appropriate help, and make sure that the correct steps are undertaken to result in an effective criminal investigation.

How important is law enforcement training? The 2023 Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Commission Report established three recommendations for 2024. Of those three, two directly touched on the issues we are discussing.

Recommendation 1: Legal services and investigative resources must be strengthened to ensure labor trafficking cases progress from identification to prosecution.

Recommendation 3: Improving coordination and data sharing between law enforcement, service providers, and tribal communities will help streamline case management and victim support.

These recommendations and the body of evidence built by the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force over the years all point to the need for more robust law enforcement programs focused on trafficking.

Law enforcement officers currently receive training in a number of ways, but two very important avenues are the initial training they receive at the academy, and the continuing education that is required for law enforcement officers (content varies by duties and by how much is dictated via a dept vs. left to officers). For both these training avenues, discussions with law enforcement academy graduates, more experienced ND law enforcement officers, and review of POST¹ courses all point to very limited training on trafficking issues, relative to other training they receive.

Law enforcement is a very difficult job, and we greatly appreciate the excellent service that ND law enforcement officers provide each year. POST and law enforcement agencies recognize that to maintain this excellence, education and training is important in an ever-changing legal and situational environment. For this reason, we believe that additional training for law enforcement officers to address trafficking crimes would be an investment in our state's welfare and be one avenue to help stem the tide of these horrible crimes.

For the aforementioned reasons, North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action respectfully requests that you render a "DO PASS" on Senate Bill 2220. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I'd be happy to stand for any questions.

Mark Jorritsma
Executive Director
North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action

¹ ND Peace Officers Standards and Training program.