

In favor of HB 1274

Chairman and members of the committee

I am writing to you today to respectfully request a Do Pass recommendation for HB 1274 with additional amendments.

My name is Ryan Dralle, I have worked for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) in Bismarck, North Dakota at the North Dakota State Penitentiary (NDSP) as an Industry specialist for Rough Rider Industries for over 5 years. Rough Rider Industries (RRI) is the prison industries division within the DOCR. RRI provides adult individuals job skills training that is necessary for reentry while providing quality goods and services in a self-sustaining manner. 97 % of individuals in prison will eventually re-enter society and we provide the real-world job skills, training and experience for our incarcerated individuals by also teaching them responsibility, accountability and teamwork. This greatly improves their odds of success once they are released from prison and all incarcerated individuals that work at RRI have lower incarceration rates once released. RRI offers many different opportunities for learning these skills through our vast industries of furniture production, signage, metal shop production and fabrication, upholstery, sewing, and current technologies of using AutoCAD, adobe illustrator and photoshop, inventor pro along with our production ordering software. The opportunities are limitless here. RRI has a fantastic purpose and I get to see the work in action everyday working with the residents and teaching them these skills regardless of their sentencing lengths. RRI gives longer sentenced individuals a chance to better themselves and give their current situations meaning and purpose along with shorter sentenced individuals skills to help re-entry more successful.

This job that comes with the benefits of improving resident lives also comes with the same dangers endured by correction officers.

Industry workers are constantly negotiating the narrow line of ensuring production and security goals are met while working side by side with our incarcerated workers each and every day for the full lengths of our shifts. We are constantly monitoring the temperaments each day of our workers that can change suddenly and drastically. We are also in separate buildings from the main parts of the prison, working with a limited security presence and often alone even though our shops are full of dangerous tools that the incarcerated workers need to do their jobs. The general negativity that surrounds the prison culture can be difficult for us to escape and does take a toll on our mental well-being over time. We have the difficult position of trying to balance worker discipline with responsibility and production, hoping the disciplinary actions taken does not jeopardize our security or production from a population that can have the mindset of “I have nothing to lose” in a retaliatory state.

In 2011, a South Dakota industry worker was attacked and murdered at the industries print shop at Pheasantland Industries at the South Dakota State Penitentiary. His name was Ronald Johnson, it was his 63rd birthday, he was working there for 23 years and nearing retirement. It was a true tragedy committed by two inmates that were already serving life sentences with “nothing to lose.” This happened in South Dakota’s prison industries at their maximum-security prison just like RRI at NDSP.

On October 12, 2017, in a North Carolina correctional facility, an inmate started a fire in the sewing industry facility while orchestrating an escape attempt. The incident resulted in four correctional facility staff casualties; two were correctional officers, one was the maintenance mechanic and the other was the sewing industry plant manager.

In 2018, at the Minnesota maximum security prison at Stillwater, 45-year-old correctional industry worker Joseph Gomm was murdered by an inmate in the prison industry metal shop. The inmate checked out a hammer to use for the day, then used it along with two homemade weapons to murder Gomm. This was the first death of a staff member in Minnesota prisons history, this is also like the current circumstances that we have at RRI. I have a wonderful young family, and these instances are always in the back of my mind when I clock in every morning

In 2020, right before an NDSP inmate was set to be released, during a heated verbal exchange, he turned to my coworker, Pat Kuntz, and told him "When I get out of here, you are first on my list." The dangers are real and constantly present.

RRI industry workers are ensuring all security measures are met while also balancing production goals. Throughout our department we are conducting security checks, tool and chemical audits, we are activating Incident Command System calls, we are monitoring the mental health of our workers, we are doing pat down searches of residents in Jamestown, we are giving rides after work to our minimum custody residents from the showroom back to MRCC. We are working our entire shifts one on one with the resident workers guiding them to give them the skills necessary to succeed upon release. We are going above and beyond to improve the societal reintegration for our resident workers, and we are very proud in doing this.

RRI industry workers have not received equity increases or retention bonuses that have been distributed DOCR wide because of our uniqueness of self-funding within the DOCR even though our current staff retention has been as low as that of the DOCR. I fear that if RRI industry workers are not included in the text of this bill that we will be deserted on this as well. I ask that our retirement gets the same treatment as the correctional officers that we work alongside with. I fully enjoy the work that we do here at RRI and see the purpose that it brings to the incarcerated individuals that we work side by side with. Industry workers endure the same daily challenges as correctional officers in a less secure environment.

Rough Rider Industries has 30 total employees, half of which spend our entire shift with the resident workers, and all of us have direct contact with incarcerated individuals in one fashion or another, ranging from the minimum to the maximum-security prisons, the difficulties and dangers are clear.

Please give HB 1274 a **Do Pass** with us Rough Rider Industry workers as a clear addition.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ryan Dralle