

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1535

Feather alert bill

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

3/27/2025

My name is James DeCoteau, and I am the Cultural Liaison to the Chairman of the Turtle Mountain Tribe, Vice President of the Turtle Mountain NAGPRA Committee, Co-Founder of the Turtle Mountain MMIP Chapter, and Lead Suit Instructor for the Turtle Mountain Impact Empowerment Self Defense program. I am honored to provide my testimony in support of House Bill 1535, which would create and enact a Feather Alert Notice System to aid in locating Indigenous individuals who are reported missing.

The creation of a Feather Alert Notice System is vital to the safety of Indigenous people in North Dakota and demonstrates a commitment to the welfare and protection of our communities. Every day, indigenous individuals—especially women and children—are disproportionately impacted by violence, abductions, and disappearances. Many of these cases go unnoticed or underreported. House Bill 1535 will help ensure that when a loved one goes missing, there is an effective and immediate response, drawing on the power of the Emergency Alert System to broadcast information to the public quickly and efficiently.

As a member of the Turtle Mountain Tribe and an advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP), I have seen firsthand the impacts of these tragedies on our families and communities. It is deeply encouraging to know that this bill will not only implement an alert system but also bring together tribal, state, and federal agencies in a collaborative effort to address this issue.

Furthermore, the establishment of a task force composed of representatives from various North Dakota tribes will foster the collaboration and communication necessary for the success of the system. This process will allow for the diverse needs and perspectives of all tribal communities to be considered, ensuring that the system is designed in a way that is both culturally appropriate and effective.

The appropriation of funds to the Indian Affairs Commission for the coordination, implementation, and evaluation of the Feather Alert Notice System is an essential step in making this initiative a reality. With proper resources, this bill can make a tangible difference in the lives of countless individuals and families across North Dakota.

For all these reasons, I wholeheartedly support House Bill 1535. This bill represents a crucial step toward creating a safer, more supportive environment for your Indigenous North Dakota constituents. It is an opportunity to take meaningful action and make a difference for those who have too often been overlooked.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
James DeCoteau

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