



Testimony prepared for the Senate Workforce Development Committee
HB 1308 – Relating to duties of the human trafficking commission
Maurice Hardy, Dakota Central Human Service Zone Director
March 14, 2025

Chair Wobbema, and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, my name is Maurice Hardy. I'm the Dakota Central Human Service Zone Director, which includes the counties of McLean, Mercer, Oliver, and Sheridan. I'm also a member of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. I am here to testify in support of HB 1308.

During my time as a Home and Community Based Case Manager, I met a woman who I'll call "Matilda."¹ Matilda was a single woman in a rural community who was living alone, and had been referred for services related to a stroke.

At that point in my career, I didn't regularly work with sex trafficking victims or offenders. But as I walked through the assessment with Matilda, her mannerisms caught my attention. She wouldn't look directly at me, and she used slang that I had learned from a session on human trafficking.

When you think about survivors of these crimes, a program for the elderly and disabled probably doesn't come to mind. But there she was.

During the assessment, Matilda shared that she had been trafficked for 31 years from the age of six. During that time, she gave birth to four children. She suffered from multiple miscarriages, forced abortions, broken bones, and at least two traumatic brain injuries.

As you can imagine, Matilda encountered many professionals and law enforcement officers over those 31 years — but either nobody recognized the signs of a trafficked person, or nobody acted.

¹ This person's name has been changed for her safety and confidentiality.

That finally changed when a detective saw Matilda at a restaurant. The detective had been trained to identify and interact with trafficking victims, and he took action. This detective helped Matilda get to a safe space. After surviving over three decades of trauma and abuse, Matilda was able to access the resources she needed to escape “The Life.”

As a survivor, Matilda taught me that traffickers are always evolving the methods, tools, and language they use to stay in the business of slavery. This makes it more challenging to recognize the signs that are right in front of us. If we want to combat trafficking effectively, we need to stay current on these changes, which requires a concentrated effort.

House Bill 1308 is part of that concentrated effort in North Dakota. It establishes a commission to collect and evaluate data, to promote awareness, and to educate school personnel and the public. Not only can this information empower us to help more victims escape “the life,” but it can help drive prevention efforts so that the number of victims gets smaller and smaller.

Human trafficking is a global virus, and North Dakota is not immune. It can be found in our largest and smallest communities. And it thrives under the shadow of ignorance. This commission can help bring it out in the open so that we can address it head on.

The North Dakota Human Service Zone Directors support HB 1308, and we ask for a “do pass vote.”

Thank you for considering my testimony. I stand for questions from the committee.