

Good Afternoon. Thank you Chairman Vedaa and members of the Government and Veteran affairs Committee, for this opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 2316, First Nations Day in North Dakota.

My name is Alicia Hegland-Thorpe. I am a Dakota woman of the Mni Wakan Oyate, the Spirit Lake Nation. I currently reside in Lincoln, which is now a part of District 7. I am a mother, a wife, an advocate for truth and healing. I'm also a member at large on the Indigenous Parent Advisory Committee, also known as the Indian Education and JOM program at Bismarck Public Schools. I have a bachelors degree in broadcasting and minor in mass comm. I'm only three classes shy of a Masters Degree in Business. My career path has been an interesting one, to keep it brief it all started with a career in radio. Eventually, moving on to become a tv news anchor and producer in small market ND. I have ventured in entrepreneurship. I have owned and operated my own travel agency. As far as I know I am the only Dakota woman to have done so in the state of North Dakota. And as far as I know I am the only Indigenous woman to have anchored the 6 and 10pm newscasts on a ND TV Station. (((***This is not taking away anything from my idol Harriet Skye who hosted Indian Country today a talk show on KFYZ TV in the 70s and 80s.***))) And while I am no longer in either one of those careers at the moment, I am currently a business consultant and a voice artist who works from home. I am blessed and humbled to be using my voice today in this setting- and am willing to do so, even more.

I want to thank all of the predecessors on this bill who paved the way back in 2003 and also, I thank those who are sponsoring and supporting this bill today, Senators Hogan and Marcellais, Representatives Dobrevitch and Nelson and all of those testifying in support of SB 2316. Everyone in support of this bill understands the importance of honoring and celebrating the indigenous people of this land, what THIS legislature calls "First Nations" people. They also understand that we aren't street names, mascots, marketing labels or halloween costumes. We are Not invisible. We are alive and well - as you can tell from my introduction- WE ARE making valuable contributions to our economy and communities, to our tribal nations, and to local and state municipalities in this Great state.

It's probably no surprise to this committee *that Native American Veterans have the highest record of military service in the Armed Forces and have served -with distinction- in every major conflict for over 200 years* - but yet our people were ONLY granted the right of citizenship and the right to vote less than 100 years ago, in 1924. And thanks to the act of Congress in 1975, called the Indian Self-Determination and Education Reform Act - we, as sovereign nations, FINALLY gained the right to openly speak our language AGAIN. To celebrate our heritage and culture Openly - again. That was *only* 45 years ago. My mother was in her 30s 45 years ago. She grew up having to learn the Dakota language in secret. This wasn't generations ago. This was my mother. Think about that. We still have so much **more** to gain and so much **more** to be recognized for when our voices are no longer suppressed.

I think it's clear and goes without saying, why the second Monday in October is so significant to this First Nations Day bill. In fact it was what the original writers of this bill wanted in the first place and we applaud them for that. But To recognize *this* day - NOW-is all the more powerful and a step toward much needed healing. Not only for our people, but for all citizens of this state. And through the *act of healing*, we create space for others to start their journey of healing. *To recognize this day* is a day to recognize that we, as Indigenous people, are survivors of a very controversial history in ND. But we ARE still here. We are survivors. That, in itself, is a beautiful reason to celebrate First Nations Day in North Dakota.

Placing FND on the second Monday in October, unifies efforts all over the US. More than 130 cities, 34 states plus the District of Columbia all observe or celebrate as a state holiday in what they call Indigenous People's Day. ND tribal nations also celebrate and acknowledge this day as a holiday. But this is not just about us, the indigenous people of North Dakota. It's about all of our indigenous brothers and sisters from all over the world, of all colors and skin tones who know with their whole heart that the LAND is their 'culture and legacy' and that water is life.

In closing, I urge a DO PASS on Senate Bill 2316.

Thank you Chairman Vedaa, and members of this committee for your time and consideration.

PIDAMAYA YAPI - I am grateful to all of you.