

March 7, 2023

SB 2003

North Dakota House Appropriations Committee

Testimony from Sgt. Mike Bolme, Investigator, Bismarck Police Department

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sgt. Mike Bolme and I am a supervisor in the Investigations Section for the Bismarck Police Department. I submit this testimony today in favor of SB 2003.

It has been my privilege to be a member of our local multidisciplinary team and statewide task force which deal with human trafficking. Much of what we are able to do is because of funding we receive from the Attorney General's Office, and specifically funding allocated by you.

When I looked at the list of people testifying for this bill, I didn't see a lot of testimony from the people who have the boots on the ground. The people that, thanks to the funding and support we get from the AG's Office, are doing the actual work with victims of human trafficking.

What that looks like in our area is a team of caring professionals who work together in the interest of the victims. Most of our victims are youth, and many of them have been subject to familial trafficking and/or sexual abuse. You can imagine the traumatic effects this has on our victims, and the incredible barriers it creates for our team. Our team includes professionals from law enforcement (both state and local), as well as service providers from social services, the Abused Adult Resource Center, the Dakota Children's Advocacy Center, Youthworks, the Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, Home on the Range, the Burleigh County States Attorney's Office, and other organizations. Our victims feel supported and cared for by our team, and from a law enforcement perspective, this looks like better witnesses when it comes time to prosecute their perpetrators.

The days of law enforcement responding to a call, taking the report, and maybe engaging with the victim one more time before trial preparation are fast disappearing. Best practice in victim-oriented policing involves establishing rapport and a relationship with that victim based on positive regard. One of the first things our team does is to send in a law enforcement officer just to chat with that victim to try to establish rapport. We generally don't even take a report during that first meeting. Most of our human trafficking victims have had a lifetime of police response which hasn't always been positive, and it takes the right kind of law enforcement and service provider teams to overcome those barriers. It is only through a team approach with our service provider partners that we can have success.

Success doesn't always look like a guilty verdict from a judge or jury. In fact, most of the human trafficking cases we investigate won't get prosecuted as trafficking. From an outsider's perspective, the percentages may look like failure. But what isn't seen, is the work we are doing with victims to help them recover from the terrible trauma they have experienced at the hands of their traffickers. Success looks like former victims who have overcome their trauma and are now contributing members of society.

Our multidisciplinary team meets almost weekly to staff cases of human trafficking. The majority of our victims are youth and the frequency of occurrence would shock most North Dakotans. The good news is we have teams across the state who are addressing all sides of this problem. By supporting this bill, you can help us in our efforts.

Sgt. Mike Bolme  
Investigator  
Bismarck Police Department