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February 06, 2023

NATIVE, Inc.
Testimony in Support of HB 1014
House Appropriations - Government Operations Division

Chairman Monson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shelby Keplin. I am an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. I am the Housing Coordinator at the Bismarck office of NATIVE, Inc., and support HB1014. We, respectively, ask this committee to consider increasing the ND homeless grant and emergency solutions grant.

Most of the public including the clients we serve at NATIVE, Inc. are in high need of rapid rehousing, resources, and permanent supportive housing services. NATIVE, Inc. has annually been awarded the ND homeless and emergency solutions grants for the past five years. Therefore, providing rapid rehousing and street outreach as an access and assessment point in Bismarck regional area since.

This means the public seeks us for financial rental assistance to cover security deposits and/or the first month's rent or for past due rent to avoid evictions and outreach to help chronic homeless persons get into the appropriate type of housing available in the community. These are HUD pass-through dollars to the state's commerce department, hence, housing providers like ours are required to utilize the HUD data software called HMIS. This takes a lot of administrative time in addition to the time and funds to provide a high level of housing services.

We can see anywhere from 85 to 110 people in need of housing per week with varying situations. Not every person that comes to our center has the same need and almost all come in requesting rental assistance and assistance with finding a landlord that will rent to them—we call this our housing support services. NATIVE, Inc. utilizes a "person-centered" approach toward serving all people who seek our housing services. We work with many different agencies to make sure our clients get all the appropriate resources and services they need. So it is not enough to expect that low-income households will be able to stabilize their housing once you provide them with rental assistance, therefore, lastly, we provide housing stabilization services--helping them find and stabilize employment or get to college, our transportation services, and if they choose to do so, we enroll them into our behavioral health prevention including smudge and prayer services and, lastly, we assist them with developing a spending plan to help them manage their money.

Lastly, I would like to share one of many of our client success stories at NATIVE, Inc. A gentleman came in and was looking for support services. He is a single father choosing to put his children into Foster Care while he addressed his own addictions and homelessness. He became our client, and he began working with our Care coordinator at NATIVE, Inc. to request an evaluation to address his recovery needs. We provided him with financial housing assistance and helped him find a landlord that was willing to rent to him, we help with maintaining his sobriety through our prayer services and cultural recovery programs and assisted with obtaining stable employment. While all these steps were taken, he maintained consistent with weekly engagements with our Care Coordinator, peer support specialist and his visitations with his children. He worked hard toward meeting the goal of reunification with his family and his goal of obtaining permanent housing. Our client with the support of our care team and other partners which included the ND Family Services, he was able to obtain an apartment of his own and moved in a few weeks ago. Sober, employed and housed in a stable home with his family home.

Nevertheless, housing services would either not be utilized or would be under-utilized if we did not have sufficient rental assistance to put or keep low-income individuals and families in a home. We hope that this committee would increase the ND homeless grant and emergency solutions grant dollars for North Dakota.

Miigwetch "Thank you" for your time. I stand for any questions.