

**House Bill No. 1536
Human Service Committee**

**Testimony Presented by
Harmony Bercier, enrolled Member, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians
January 23, 2023**

For the record, my name is Harmony Bercier, I am the former Grant Manager for the North Dakota Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Implementation Partnership Grant and the current Prevention Services Program Developer at the Native American Training Institute. I am writing to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1536.

For the last 7 years many state and tribal partners have collaboratively worked very hard to improve the accurate implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act to reduce the disproportionate number of Indian children in foster care. Through strengthened partnerships and improved collaboration there have been meaningful decreases in disproportionality. Much of this can be attributed to the great strides ND has made in building meaningful partnerships that create a network of people who are committed to creating better outcomes for Indian children and families. Much has been done by way of training, tribal empowerment, and state, court, and tribal collaboration and support. Additionally, a grant developed, now state funded, ICWA Family Preservation Program, a program that supports the real time accurate implementation of ICWA, a true test of ICWA, has demonstrated that when ICWA is implemented accurately, it does exactly what it is intended to do: keep Indian children safe with their family. North Dakota is identified nationally as a leader in this arena. Encouraged by the Federal grant program manager, the process has begun to submit for another multi-million-dollar grant to reinforce and share with other state and tribal partners, the pathways and progress that has been made here in North Dakota. ICWA is hailed as the gold standard in child welfare. The Indian Child Welfare Act began here in this state, and it is imperative that the state further affirms its leadership and commitment to the Spirit and Letter of the Indian Child Welfare Act by instituting the law into North Dakota Century Code.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

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