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"Restoring hope. Building futures. Changing lives."

House Bill No. 1269

House Judiciary Committee

Testimony presented by Michelle Erickson

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Chairman Klemin and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Good Morning. My name is Michelle Erickson and I am the Executive Director of the Abused Adult Resource Center (AARC) in Bismarck with 17 years of working with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault crimes. AARC serves a seven-county area in South Central North Dakota including Standing Rock Indian Reservation. We are one of 20 dual domestic violence and sexual assault programs in North Dakota. I am here today to provide testimony in support of HB1269.

You may wonder why as a victim services provider we would feel strongly about supporting this bill. As you know, the crimes of domestic violence and sexual assault are not limited to just those two categories. Those crimes also involve additional crimes such as stalking, harassment, felonious restraint, aggravated assault, interference with 911 calls, and murder just to name a few.

Domestic Violence Intervention Programming consists of 24-26 weeks of classes designed to help men examine their belief system and behaviors that support violence, expand definitions of violence and controlling behaviors, discuss the effects of violence on women, children and themselves and identify and practice non-controlling alternatives.

When Lutheran Social Services (LSS) closed abruptly in 2021, one of the consequences was that the Domestic Violence Intervention Programs were left without a place to call home. AARC felt strongly that by assuming programming for this we would be able to offer yet one more service that could help eliminate the possibility of more violence in our communities. In July of 2021, we were granted funding from the Department of Health in the amount of \$35,602.00 for 2 years. We contracted with former facilitators from LSS to provide the classes and assigned coordination of the project to an existing AARC staff member. In January of 2022, we started our first class. We also contracted with a former LSS facilitator to provide a different curriculum, Turning Points, to women who have used violence in their relationships. Throughout 2022, we had 17 men participate in classes and 9 women.

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AARC believes that by expanding the crimes listed under N.D.C.C. § 12.1-17-13 to include murder, manslaughter, negligent homicide, harassment, stalking, kidnapping, felonious restraint, unlawful imprisonment, criminal mischief, interference with a telephone during an emergency call, and violations of disorderly conduct restraining orders, no contact orders, and domestic violence protection orders, it will hold more offenders accountable for their crimes, refer more participants to classes, and continue to decrease violence in our community.

We also support the language change from evaluation to assessment and treatment to intervention programming. Evaluation and treatment are generally thought of as something related to disease or illness. Domestic violence is a choice made by that person to inflict harm, whether physically or mentally on another person. Intervention is key in reducing violence and challenging the belief systems of offenders.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and with that, I stand for questions.