

House Judiciary Committee
HCR 3026
March 1, 2023

Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee, my name is Patrick Bertagnolli, and I am the Executive Director for Job Service North Dakota. I submit this testimony in support of HCR 3026.

I have been a member of the Workforce Development Council (The Council) since 2014 and continue to serve on The Council in my current capacity as Executive Director of Job Service North Dakota. Through The Council's work, we have recognized the need to provide support to populations with barriers to employment, and Ex-Offenders were identified as one such population. These individuals experience barriers to entering the workforce, including the life-long impact of a criminal conviction on their record. Without a steady paycheck allowing for basic needs to be met, many ex-offenders return to the prisons as indicated by North Dakota's recidivism rate of 40.3% in 2020.

Currently North Dakota has returned to pre-pandemic unemployment levels with a rate of 2.2% in December of 2022. North Dakota is also one of five states who have the highest labor participation rate in the nation, but we continue to have a high number of open jobs. These are key indicators that there is a gap in the availability of workers across the state. Ex-offenders are a target group to fill these jobs, including in-demand positions in skilled trades, transportation, IT, and a wide variety of other industries.

Job Service North Dakota Workforce Centers work with ex-offenders across the state, often partnering with other agencies to help remove barriers to meaningful employment. With support of The Council, we requested additional funding for a Job Placement Pilot program through a partnership with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. This program will allow a more focused approach to the ex-offender population.

We welcome the opportunity to participate in studies to assess re-entry services available throughout the state and we support having the ability to recognize and maximize resources through state and private partnerships. Through this type of holistic approach, we can identify additional strategies to remove barriers and allow ex-offenders to engage in meaningful work and improve employment outcomes.