

Senate Bill 2015

68th Legislative Assembly

Senate Appropriations – Government Operations Division

Written Testimony

January 20, 2023

Chairman Wanzek and all committee members,

My name is Chelsey Williams and I am a member of the North Dakota Community Corrections Association [NDCCA]. I am providing written testimony in support of Senate Bill 2015 which (among other financial items) calls for the allocation of funding to line item Community Service Supervision Grants [Page 1 / Line 19 & Page 2 / Section 3] on behalf of the North Dakota Community Corrections Association in the amount of \$350,000 for the upcoming biennium [2023-2025].

As with many agencies across the State of North Dakota, the NDCCA is still recovering from the difficult circumstances encountered over the last three years and are now attempting to offset costs of inflation while providing competitive wages. The financial hardships members of the NDCCA are facing lead us to ask for the assistance of the North Dakota 68th Legislative Assembly to pass Senate Bill 2015 calling for the allocation of funding to the Community Service Supervision Grants so that we can continue to keep our doors open. Many, if not all, members of the NDCCA have experienced numerous difficulties over the past three years including having to suspend office operations, loss of community service work-sites, loss of referrals for community service and loss of income.

To those who are unfamiliar with the North Dakota Community Corrections Association, the NDCCA was established in 1995 and is composed of sixteen agencies located across North Dakota that monitor adult/juvenile offenders in the community who are ordered to complete community service as part of a court ordered sentence or as ordered by a probation department. Community service is a multifaceted tool as it can be used as an alternative to incarceration, a direct sanction by courts and drug courts, can be worked to pay off court ordered fines or supervision fees or implemented as an intermediate measure for supervised probation offenders.

Benefits of Community Service to Communities & Successfulness of Community Service

- 1) Allows offenders to remain in the community to continue their employment, education and maintain their family unit.
- 2) Offenders can learn life/work skills and maybe even gain employment at a community service work-site.
- 3) Is an opportunity for offenders to learn from their destructive behavior and change their behavioral and thinking patterns for the positive.
- 4) Serves as a restorative purpose as it requires offenders to repay their debt to their local community.
- 5) Non-profit organizations and government entities save on payroll when utilizing community service workers.
- 6) NDCCA covers offenders with volunteer workers insurance to ensure their wellbeing and so that the non-profits we work with do not accrue that risk or cost.
- 7) Communities can save money in jail costs when community service is used as an alternative to incarceration.
- 8) With local jails/prisons being filled to maximum capacity, community service is needed now more than ever in order to ease the high rates of incarceration.
- 9) As part of a NDCCA Recidivism Study, it was found that during a three year period (2016, 2017 and 2018) there was an average successful completion rate of 78.3% of offenders who were ordered to complete community service hours. Furthermore, during that same time frame an average rate of 69.7% of all offenders who were ordered to complete community service did NOT have an act of recidivism in the year following their offense.

Community service is an essential program and it is also a fiscally smart option. Over a 5 year time span (2018 through 2022) the offenders working with the NDCCA performed a total of 164,067 hours of community service; this calculated to \$1,312,536 in saved payroll expenses based on a wage of \$8.00 per hour. Further savings of

\$1,312,536 was saved in jail costs when the estimated cost to house an inmate in jail/prison is \$80.00 per day and typically 10 hours of community service is the equivalent to 1 day in jail. Those savings (payroll expenses and costs of incarceration) total \$2,625,072 in savings across the State of North Dakota from 2018 through 2022. If those numbers aren't impressive enough, please consider this: in that same time frame in which \$2,625,072 was saved (2018-2022) the NDCCA received state funding in the amount of \$875,000 which means \$1,750,072 was added into local communities across the state.

Monies received will be divided among the sixteen agencies over the upcoming biennium so that the NDCCA can continue monitoring community service offenders and supporting local communities. Funding will be used to help each agency offset the costs of maintaining a place of business, purchasing office supplies required for daily duties, financially supporting staff and allowing the NDCCA to remain as an alternative to incarceration for courts and probation departments who are enforcing state laws. The NDCCA does not solely depend on the State of North Dakota for funding; however, monies received greatly impact the effectiveness of each office. Other sources of income vary program to program, but in general include program fees as paid by offenders, grants and city/county funding.

In conclusion, I would like to impress upon you the importance of the North Dakota Community Corrections Association as we request your support for funding in Senate Bill 2015 for the amount of \$350,000 (Community Service Supervision Grants). We are a valuable resource to the State of North Dakota and its citizens as we are making a difference in the lives of offenders, helping non-profit organizations reach their goals and can be utilized as a way to lower incarceration rates as well as incarceration costs. We are greatly appreciative of any funding previously provided and believe we should continue to be funded because in a difficult budgeting session, we are a fiscally good decision.

Included with this testimony is the NDCCA 2018 Recidivism Study – NDCCA Totals.

Sincerely,
Chelsey Williams
NDCCA Member
Grand Forks Community Service Program
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