

HB 1536, ICWA Hearing 3-22-23 Senate Human Services

Good morning, Chairwoman Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services Committee. For the record my name is Representative Lisa Finley-DeVilleville. I am an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara nation. I represent the people of District 4 A which includes the Fort Berthold Reservation. I am here to testify in support of House bill 1536 as I am a cosponsor of the bill.

As you may know, Federal ICWA laws are facing scrutiny at the highest level of our judicial system. Which is why I support North Dakota adopting similar provisions to protect our Native children.

House bill 1536 addresses the unique needs and rights of Native children in the foster care system by placing Native children in Native homes. Like ICWA, House bill 1536 will preserve the cultural and kinship ties that exist within our communities by placing Native Children in homes where they will be raised within their own cultural traditions and values. As Native people, our identity is our culture, tradition, heritage, language, and our families. By adopting and implementing State ICWA policies, we can ensure that Native children receive the best possible care and support while preserving their cultural, heritage, tradition and familial ties.

As young children, my two younger siblings and I were removed from our home. Because of ICWA, we were placed with our grandmother who took us in and raised us. Stories like mine are about how ICWA was designed to work and benefit Native children.

While there have been legal challenges to the law, many agencies continue to support its underlying principles and its goal of promoting the best interests of Native American children. I ask that the committee recognize the need for State ICWA provisions and how it is essential to the well-being of Native American children. I ask that you give a do pass recommendation for House bill 1536 and join us to work for the protection of Native children and youth. Thank you, I will now stand for questions.