

## **Testimony: SB 2257**

Good morning, Madam Chair Larson & members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Lindsey Burkhardt and I'm the Director of the North Dakota Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Task Force. Today I am here to testify in support of **SB 2257**.

I want to provide you with a brief history of the Task Force:

- In the 2017 legislative session, Senate Bill 2342 established Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Task Force.
- During the 2019 session, House Bill 1237, re-established the Task Force through 2024.
- During the 2021 legislative session, funds were appropriated to hire a director for the task force. Funds were appropriated to the Department of Health.
- In January of 2022, I was hired by Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota as the Director of the Task Force.

When it comes to child sexual abuse, the statistics are shocking. According to the 2022 Annual Report of the ND Children's Advocacy Centers, 1 in every 10 children in North Dakota will be a victim of sexual abuse by their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday; approximately 65% of those victims will be female. And those numbers likely underestimate the true scope of the problem...we know that over 30% of victims never disclose their abuse. About 90% of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their abuser. Only 10% of sexually abused children are abused by a stranger. As many as 40% of children who are sexually abused are abused by older or more powerful children.

The North Dakota Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Task Force is committed to developing and implementing a comprehensive statewide approach to the prevention of child sexual abuse.

I'd like to highlight a few of our accomplishments throughout the last year.

**Environmental Scan:** As you will find in our 2022 Annual Report (included in the packet provided), in April we conducted a state-wide environmental scan. Respondents of this survey included: Public, private, and tribal schools across North Dakota. Head Start Programs. Youth-Serving Organizations and Childcare Programs. The survey was open for 18 days and within that period, the Task Force received 203 responses from all ND regions and four tribal nations.

In total, 60% of respondents identified that they felt a lack of an established curriculum was the greatest barrier.

**Resource Guide:** From the feedback received, the Primary Prevention Subcommittee (which operates under the umbrella of the Task Force) began working on a Resource Guide for schools, youth-serving organizations, and childcare facilities. The Resource Guide has now been finalized and will be available in print by mid-February and is currently available online at [www.ndstopcsa.com](http://www.ndstopcsa.com). The Primary Prevention Subcommittee is currently working on a Resource Guide for Caregivers.

**Richland County Pilot Project:** In the summer of 2022, we began visioning a pilot project that focused on multi-level prevention practices. Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota, with the support of the Task Force, submitted a grant proposal on October 5<sup>th</sup> that outlined a pilot project to be completed in Richland County North Dakota. The project aims to implement

targeted prevention education to children and to adults, a public awareness and social media campaign, and ongoing data analysis of the project's impacts. Just last week we received notice that we were granted \$130,000 to conduct this project. At the end of the project, our hope is to have a comprehensive approach to CSA prevention that can be duplicated in other counties across the state.

**Education & Awareness:** Over the last year, we've dedicated time offering presentations and education to various professionals, we've had educational booths at events across the state, and have spread awareness of our work through the press.

**Vision:** Our vision for the future is big. The Task Force plans to provide support and guidance throughout the Richland County pilot project and upon completion will seek additional funding to conduct another project within a tribal community. We will continue to build resources and finalize the resource guide for caregivers. The resource guides will be updated annually to ensure best practices are reflected and the newest prevention strategies are encompassed. Our hope is to create a statewide committee focused on CSA prevention efforts by involving prevention educators across the state (to determine what is being done and where gaps exist). We plan to continue working with organizations across the state and provide ongoing education around CSA prevention and aid with strengthening internal policies and procedures. The Task Force will continue raising awareness across North Dakota for the years to come.

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, I joined Prevent Child Abuse ND and took on the role of Task Force Director. Over the last year, I've been asked countless times, "*How can you do the work you do? That must be so hard*". And, in the beginning of my time in this position, it was easy to allow fear to take over. I worried about children. I worried about my daughters and keeping them safe, the statistics scared me, and the headlines consumed me. But I quickly realized that hope is so much stronger than fear. I have hope that we can provide the children of North Dakota with childhoods safe from child sexual abuse.

I wholeheartedly believe that the Task Force is creating meaningful change and through our work prevention is possible.

Thank you. I will now answer any questions you may have.