

March 8, 2023

The Honorable Michael A. Wobbema
Chair, ND Senate Workforce Development Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Chairman Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee,

I write in favor of House Bill 1280 and urge a “do pass” recommendation. I serve as an assistant state’s attorney in Cass County, and I am a member of one of the multi-disciplinary team for one of two adult drug courts sponsored by the East Central Judicial District in Fargo.

Drug court consists of several components: intensive supervision through probation, substance abuse treatment, frequent alcohol and drug testing, and ongoing contact with a district court judge. With each of these fundamental pieces, a lot is asked of drug court participants. They are required to meet weekly with a probation officer. They are required to meet weekly in court with a district judge. They are required to attend two community support groups (*e.g.*, alcoholics anonymous, narcotics anonymous, etc.). They have to meet regularly with a sponsor. They are also required to maintain regular, full-time employment or be enrolled in full-time education or vocational training.

For a variety of reasons, many drug court participants begin the program with a suspended, revoked, or otherwise cancelled driver’s license. The inability to legally operate a motor vehicle is a major barrier to all of the requirements listed above. Without reliable transportation, one cannot get to work, treatment, or court. While current law allows active drug court participants to obtain a temporary restricted license while in the program, HB 1280 would clarify statutory language to preclude denials for participants who have suspensions or revocations for out-of-state driving offenses.

Further, full reinstatement of driving privileges is appropriate as an incentive for successful completion of the drug court program. Those who graduate drug court have successfully participated in the program for at least 12 months. They have demonstrated at least 90 consecutive days of verified abstinence from alcohol and controlled substances. They have set and met individual goals

in treatment and have developed a relapse prevention plan. Research shows that court graduation is statistically significant in reducing recidivism.

So why is this a workforce issue? Drug court participants are highly motivated to obtain and maintain long-term employment. For them, the alternative is prison. Full-time employment is a condition of the program, but it is also fundamental to success and independence after drug court. I have heard many stories at drug court graduation ceremonies from past participants who, prior to drug court, had never held a steady job for more than a few weeks and have now built careers. These individuals were not in the workforce prior to the program and are now contributing to the economy in a meaningful way.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Nick Samuelson

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