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## PROTECTION AND VICTIM SERVICES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, September 30, 2025  
Roughrider Room, State Capitol  
Bismarck, North Dakota

Representative Bernie Satrom, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

**Members present:** Representatives Bernie Satrom, Lawrence R. Klemin, Mary Schneider, Lori VanWinkle; Senators Keith Boehm, Ryan Braunberger, David A. Clemens, Dick Dever, Diane Larson

**Members absent:** Representatives TJ Brown and Jason Dockter.

**Others present:** Lindsey Burkhardt, Families Flourish North Dakota and North Dakota Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Task Force; Christy Dodd, Families Flourish North Dakota; Anna Frissell, Youthworks; Christopher Johnson, Rape & Abuse Crisis Center of Fargo-Moorhead and North Dakota Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Task Force; Greg Kasowski, Children Advocacy Centers of North Dakota; Rachel Kmetz and Kate LePage, Attorney General's office; Jill Manning\*, mental health practitioner and researcher; Stacy Schaffer, 31:8 Project.

*\*Attended remotely*

See [Appendix A](#) for additional persons present.

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Chairman Satrom provided introductory remarks on the committee's assigned studies.

Ms. Victoria Christian, Counsel, Legislative Council, presented a memorandum entitled [Supplementary Rules of Operation and Procedure of the North Dakota Legislative Management](#).

### CRIMINAL CONDUCT AGAINST CHILDREN

Ms. Christian presented a memorandum entitled [Laws on Criminal Conduct Against Children Study - Background Memorandum](#).

Ms. Lindsey Burkhardt, Director, North Dakota Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Task Force, and Dr. Christopher Johnson, Chair, North Dakota Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Task Force, presented a report ([Appendix B](#)) from the task force regarding its activities and recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse in North Dakota. They noted:

- An initial statewide environmental scan survey was conducted by the task force over a 10-day period in April 2022 to determine current education measures, perspectives, and processes intended to prevent child sexual abuse, revealing that over half of respondent schools did not provide child sexual abuse education to children, employees, or volunteers.
- The April 2022 survey identified a lack of established curriculum, social implications, and time as barriers to providing child sexual abuse education.
- The task force conducted a pilot project in Richland County, providing child sexual abuse prevention education to 387 children and 142 adults.
- Focusing on child sexual abuse prevention and education, the task force developed a caregiver guide for parents and a resource guide for schools, youth service organizations, and child care

providers.

- Final recommendations of the task force include supporting infrastructure, establishing a statewide advisory committee, prioritizing vulnerable populations, and integrating emerging research and best practices.

In response to questions from committee members, Dr. Johnson noted the child sexual abuse curriculum provided to children is age appropriate and focused on risk factors and grooming behaviors, rather than sexual interaction.

Ms. Christy Dodd, Executive Director, Families Flourish ND, provided information ([Appendix C](#)) regarding the child abuse prevention programs facilitated by Families Flourish ND, formerly known as Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota. She noted:

- The Handle With Care Program is a collaboration between law enforcement, first responders, and schools to ensure a child exposed to a traumatic event receives the appropriate attention and support in school.
- By the age of 18, 1 in 10 children in North Dakota will experience sexual abuse.
- The Alliance for Children's Justice Task Force meets quarterly to unite professionals from across the state concerned about child abuse and neglect to collaborate, identify challenges, and advocate for systemic change.
- Authentic Voices is a program providing an opportunity for individuals impacted by child abuse or neglect to share their stories, educate, and help protect children.
- During Child Abuse Prevention Month in April, Families Flourish conducts an awareness campaign and awards grants to nonprofit programs promoting child abuse prevention.
- Families Flourish provides a free, publicly available training for mandated reporters on what to report and how to report concerns of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Mr. Greg Kasowski, Executive Director, Children's Advocacy Centers of North Dakota, provided information ([Appendix D](#)) regarding the function of the four Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) that operate 12 locations across the state and serve every county and tribal nation. He noted:

- CACs prevent retraumatization by serving as a central location for child victims of abuse and neglect to tell their story to trained forensic interviewers and receive services.
- In 2024, 1,921 children were served by CACs in the state.

Mr. Kasowski presented 10 policy recommendations ([Appendix D](#)):

- Amending the language of North Dakota Century Code Chapter 12.1-27.2 to remove the phrase "sexual performance by a minor."
- Evaluating the effectiveness of including "computer-generated image" in the types of materials prohibited and penalty enhancements for the crime of possession of certain materials prohibited in Section 12.1-27.2-04.1 for law enforcement and prosecutors.
- Redirecting minors who use artificial intelligence to create sexually explicit images.
- Addressing sextortion and sadistic online exploitation.
- Strengthening protocols for safe hiring of school personnel.
- Enhancing protections for children in homeschool environments.
- Criminalizing child grooming.
- Banning nondisclosure agreements in child sexual abuse cases.
- Banning child sex dolls.

- Considering the adoption of a separate juvenile criminal code.

### **DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS OF PORNOGRAPHY**

Ms. Christian presented a memorandum entitled [Detrimental Impacts of Pornography Study - Background Memorandum](#).

Dr. Jill Manning, mental health practitioner and researcher, provided information ([Appendix E](#)) regarding the impact and social costs of modern pornography. She noted:

- Defined as sexually explicit material in print, digital, or audiovisual form primarily intended to sexually arouse the consumer, pornography is highly impactful due to its dynamic, compact, rapid, potent, and anonymous nature.
- In the United States, 8.6 percent of adults struggle with compulsive sexual behavior disorder, characterized by a persistent pattern of failure to control intense, repetitive, sexual impulses or urges resulting in repetitive sexual behavior.
- Problematic pornography use increases strain on relationships and is associated with increased aggression and abuse, objectification of females, job loss, infidelity, deception, inadequate parenting, and substance abuse.
- Pornography has a heightened effect on adolescents, impacting brain development and leading to decreased impulse control, lack of emotional regulation, increased susceptibility to addiction, behavioral and mental health issues, low self-esteem, reduced empathy, and impaired academic performance.

In response to questions from committee members, Dr. Manning noted:

- An effective policy for targeting pornography requires a layered approach, including age verification laws, smartphone restrictions in schools, enforcement of obscenity laws, comprehensive education, and the responsibility of parents to protect their children. Insurance is increasingly recognizing and covering services related to compulsive sexual behavior disorder. The impact of pornography on children is dynamic and increasing due to technological advances, including artificial intelligence.

### **HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIM SERVICES**

Ms. Christian presented a memorandum entitled [Human Trafficking Victim Service and Re-Entry Programs Study - Background Memorandum](#).

Ms. Anna Frissell, Anti-Trafficking Program Manager, Youthworks, provided information ([Appendix F](#)) regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth human trafficking victims. She noted:

- An individual under age 18 induced to perform a commercial sexual act is a trafficking victim regardless of consent.
- Youth specific human trafficking victim indicators include grooming by older adults, peer-to-peer exploitation, criminal activity involvement, online exploitation, prior history of sexual abuse, multiple runaway incidents, and familial exploitation.
- Inadequate access to housing, distrust of law enforcement, and limited resources for holistic support and culturally appropriate healing act as barriers for youth victims of human trafficking seeking help.
- Trauma bonds and trauma induced survival behaviors in youth victims may make engagement and compliance with programming expectations difficult, often resulting in removal from treatment placement or housing programs.
- Youthworks served 134 human trafficking victims ages 12 to 24 in 2025, providing clinical services, crisis intervention, housing support, and multidisciplinary response services.

Ms. Stacy Schaffer, Founder and Executive Director, 31:8 Project, provided information ([Appendix G](#)) regarding the programming and core service areas provided by the 31:8 Project for adult victims of

human trafficking. She noted:

- The Demand Reduction Program is an intermediate sentencing and diversion program designed to reduce recidivism of offenders sentenced under Section 12.1-29-06 or Chapter 12.1-41, providing education on the impact of prostitution and sex trafficking on communities, survivors, spouses, and children.
- Survivors referred to the 31:8 Project are assessed by a case manager and paired with a mentor to help the survivor set and achieve goals.
- In 2024, 62 survivors received services, including behavioral and mental health care, housing, life skills and education, health care, and legal assistance, with 80 percent of survivors served identifying as victims of trafficking in North Dakota.

In response to questions from committee members, Ms. Schaffer discussed situations in which victims of trafficking are charged with crimes as a result of actions taken in the course of being trafficked and the necessity of providing a reporting hotline in addition to advertising campaigns that use verbiage victims are able to understand.

Ms. Rachel Kmetz, Finance Director, Attorney General's office, presented a report ([Appendix H](#)) regarding the Human Trafficking Grant Program administered by the Attorney General's office for the 2023-25 biennium. She noted:

- The Drug and Violent Crime Policy Board reviewed the human trafficking grant applications for the limited funding available and made an award recommendation to the Attorney General who approved the board's allocation.
- Grantees must provide documentation of approved expenditures to the Attorney General's office to receive the allocated funds.
- The total amount awarded through the Human Trafficking Grant Program during the biennium was \$1,150,404.

Ms. Kate LePage, Human Trafficking Task Force Coordinator, Attorney General's office provided information ([Appendix I](#)) regarding the roles of the Human Trafficking Commission and the Human Trafficking Task Force. She noted:

- The Human Trafficking Commission was established in 2015 by a grant of authority to the Attorney General for statewide data collection, public awareness, and the provision of victim services.
- In 2025, the membership and duties of the Human Trafficking Commission were statutorily expanded to require the provision of human trafficking education to students and professionals.
- The task force receives federal funding to increase labor trafficking awareness, expand treatment and recovery services for victims, build trust between victims and law enforcement, increase response and reporting measures, increase shelter capacity, and increase the capacity and sustainability of the task force.
- Human trafficking is a supply and demand based enterprise and common pathways to recruitment include familial coercion, child sexual abuse material, and abusive relationships.
- The task force served 238 victims during the first quarter of 2025, with 35 percent of victims identifying as indigenous.

Ms. LePage noted task force priorities include:

- Training and education on traumatic brain injuries, trauma informed care, and culturally responsive practices.
- Developing screening tools, resource guides, and informational material on common trafficking statutes and court processes.
- Building a statewide data reporting framework.

- Exploring the creation of a single statewide human trafficking resource number.

In response to questions from committee members, Ms. LePage noted the majority of victims served by the task force are from North Dakota; however, there are some victims who are from other states due to the transient nature of human trafficking.

No further business appearing, Chairman Satrom adjourned the meeting at 4:08 p.m.

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Victoria Christian  
Counsel

ATTACH:9