



North Dakota Native Vote  
919 S 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Suite 603  
Bismarck, ND 58504

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**Testimony of Nicole Donaghy, Executive Director  
North Dakota Native Vote  
In Support of House Bill 1611**

Chairman Beltz and Members of the House Agriculture Committee, my name is Nicole Donaghy, Executive Director for North Dakota Native Vote. North Dakota Native Vote supports House Bill 1611, which proposes a legislative management study regarding the environmental and public health risks of oil and chemical spills on state highways within the Fort Berthold Reservation.

Oil and chemical spills are not just isolated incidents; they represent a significant public health and environmental threat, especially for rural and tribal communities. Fort Berthold's state highways are heavily trafficked by vehicles transporting crude oil, produced water, frac sand and potentially hazardous chemicals, which increases the likelihood of spills that release emissions and contaminants into the surrounding air, soil, and water systems.

This study would create an understanding of how chronic exposure to toxic substances released during and after oil and chemical spills may have links to illnesses and pollution.

These health risks are compounded by existing health disparities in rural Native communities, where access to healthcare services is limited. Conducting a thorough study will provide critical insights into how these exposures affect the population and help inform public health strategies and interventions.

Oil and chemical spills can also have devastating environmental consequences, with long-lasting impacts on ecosystems. Toxic runoff can contaminate nearby water bodies, including the Missouri River, which is a vital resource for drinking water, agriculture, and fishing. Soil contamination can render land unusable for years and further exacerbate environmental degradation in the region. Without a comprehensive understanding of the frequency, severity, and long-term impacts of these spills, we cannot adequately address or prevent further damage.

A key strength of HB 1611 is the emphasis on collaboration with the Three Affiliated Tribes. The inclusion of tribal leadership and local environmental experts in the study is necessary to ensure a culturally informed and scientifically rigorous approach.

I ask the House Agriculture committee to give HB 1611 a Do Pass recommendation and to support this bill and move it forward for the health, safety, and well-being of all of North Dakota's communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.