

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Appropriations committee.

My name is Austen Schauer, District 13, West Fargo.

Today, I bring you **House Bill 1199** as amended, a bill that would create a **Missing Indigenous Persons (MIP) Task Force** in North Dakota.

HB 1199 addresses a growing crisis that demands our immediate attention.

The statistics are startling: Indigenous communities in North Dakota are disproportionately impacted by violence and disappearance.

According to the **National Crime Information Center**, more than **95 hundred Indigenous persons** were reported missing nationwide in 2020, many of the cases remain unresolved.

In North Dakota, this crisis is especially evident. Indigenous women are murdered at more than **10 times the national average**, as reported by the **CDC** in 2021.

The **gap** between the *gravity* of this problem and *response* to it is alarming.

The challenge is compounded by the geographic isolation of many Indigenous communities in North Dakota.

The remoteness of these communities, coupled with limited resources and inconsistent law enforcement responses, has resulted in unsolved or delayed cases.

As we learned in an extremely emotional **GVA** hearing, families are left without answers, and vital investigations stall because of **jurisdiction complexities** and **lack of communication** between tribal, state, and federal agencies.

HB 1199 presents a *solution-oriented approach* to this problem.

1. **Centralized Data System:**

The first step in solving any problem is understanding it. By creating a **unified data system** to track **MIP** cases across tribal, state, and federal jurisdictions, the **task force** will address the current fragmentation in data collection. This system will allow real-time tracking, ensuring most cases will not go unnoticed.

2. **Improved Collaboration across Agencies:**

Jurisdictional barriers between tribal nations, local law enforcement, and state agencies are one of the main reasons cases remain unsolved.

The **National Institute of Justice** highlights this pointing out that coordination between agencies is key to resolving cases effectively.

HB 1199 will mandate streamlined communication and collaboration to ensure investigations are handled swiftly and efficiently, without unnecessary delays.

3. **Cultural Relevant Solutions:**

Indigenous communities face unique cultural and legal needs that must be respected in any response to **MIP** cases.

The **Indian Law Resource Center** emphasizes the importance of including Indigenous leaders in shaping policy to ensure intervention is not only effective but also respectful of tribal values and traditions.

4. **Public Awareness and Education:**

Raising public awareness is critical to addressing the **MIP** crisis.

According to a study by the **Urban Indian Health Institute**, many cases go unreported or under-reported, largely due to lack of awareness.

The **task force** will lead public awareness campaigns to educate the public, and train law enforcement on specific challenges facing Indigenous communities.

North Dakota has a clear opportunity to lead the way in finding answers to this problem.

The objectives of **HB 1199** are clear:

- **Faster case resolution.**
- **Improve trust between law enforcement and Indigenous communities.**
- **Reduce crime.**
- **Restore justice and dignity to families who have long been denied answers.**

The cost of inaction is no longer an option.

Not only are lives being lost, but we risk the erosion of trust between North Dakota's Indigenous communities and state/local law enforcement.

Details of the Task Force are outlined in pages 4 and 5 of the amended **HB 1199**.

The Attorney General will serve as the chair of the Task Force which will meet quarterly or as needed.

You will notice **HB 1199** seeks the DPI Superintendent as a Task Force member. That is to assist school leaders in the missing of adolescent girls and boys...and provide more awareness to this problem.

The ask is **\$250 thousand dollars** for the next biennium with funding to continue through **2035** for consistency and stability.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, we seek your support of **HB 1199**.

Thank you and I stand open to questions.