

Testimony of Jamie Belgarde, LMSW

In support of House Bill 1569 – Sex Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Curriculum

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Jamie Belgarde and I am a citizen of Rolette County. I am an enrolled member of the MHA Nation and a descendant of Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. I have worked in the Turtle Mountains resided near the Turtle Mountains for over 14 years.

I am writing to support HB 1569 because for Indigenous youth, this bill would help address issues that directly affect our vulnerable children in tribal communities. There are many factors that make our Indigenous youth susceptible to falling victim to sex trafficking perpetrators. Our youth are preyed upon because they are viewed as being “easy targets” to being kidnapped, taken, or lured away from their homes.

Jurisdiction is a huge problem when our Indigenous people go missing because it takes a longer length of time to determine who is responsible for finding our people. That allows enough time for the victims to be relocated to an unknown location. There is a lack of cameras to track where a youth may have been taken from or where the vehicle may be headed. Specifically in the Turtle Mountains, we are a rural community that does not have adequate cell phone service to track a child’s location.

Current technology, social media, gaming applications, and other media outlets make contacting a juvenile easy and sometimes difficult to track. Our youth are being groomed by perpetrators online and are arranging meet ups in undisclosed locations. As a Licensed Master of Social Worker, adolescents are cognitively incapable of identifying when they might be exchanging information with an unsafe person. HB 1569 would be able to help students become aware of some of the red flags of sex trafficking. Awareness is a vital to helping our children safe in the virtual world we see today. We may not be able to protect them always, but this a healthy step in the right way to try to protect them as trusted individuals.

I strongly support HB 1569 and I see the power of awareness and prevention in such a difficult subject of sex trafficking. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Jamie Belgarde, LMSW