

## **Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 1199**

Honorable Members of the Legislative Assembly,

My name is James DeCoteau, and I stand before you today as a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, and the co-founder of the Turtle Mountain MMIP Chapter here in North Dakota. I am here to express my strong support for House Bill No. 1199, which addresses the critical issues of missing and murdered indigenous people within our state. This legislation is not just a bill; it is a needed step toward justice and healing in our community.

For far too long, our tribes have faced unique challenges when it comes to the safety and well-being of our members. The disproportionate rates of missing persons among indigenous populations reflect a grim reality that cannot be ignored. Each of these cases represents not just a statistic but a family devastated by loss, a community impacted, and a life interrupted. This bill recognizes the urgency of this matter by establishing a Missing Indigenous People Task Force, which will focus on identifying the barriers that prevent effective responses to these terrible situations.

The provision for a missing person repository is particularly significant. Such a resource will facilitate the timely sharing of information, allowing law enforcement personnel to collaborate more effectively in their search efforts. The inclusion of demographic data related to indigenous people is essential – it ensures that our unique needs and circumstances are acknowledged and addressed.

Furthermore, I cannot stress enough the importance of having a task force comprised of representatives from each federally recognized tribe. This inclusive approach will foster cooperation and communication among tribes and state authorities, enhancing our ability to respond comprehensively to cases of missing individuals. It emphasizes the principle of respect for tribal sovereignty and recognizes our right to self-determination.

This bill also establishes the framework for ongoing funding through the missing indigenous people grant fund, empowering tribes to better assist their community members in identifying, reporting, and finding missing indigenous individuals. This financial support is crucial, as it provides the necessary resources to implement proactive measures and strategies tailored to the specific challenges faced by each tribe.

In conclusion, House Bill No. 1199 represents not only a legislative measure but also a commitment to our indigenous communities. It signals a turning point in the way we address the challenges of missing and murdered indigenous people, reinforcing our collective responsibility to protect and uplift our community members.

I want to emphasize that there are multiple families in my community who have never found answers or peace of mind about their loved ones who have gone missing. This bill is a crucial step towards providing those families with hope and support. I urge all members of the Legislative Assembly to support this bill wholeheartedly and to take a stand against the injustices that have plagued our communities for far too long.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Together, we can make a meaningful difference.

Sincerely,

James DeCoteau  
Co-founder Turtle Mountain MMIP chapter  
P: 701-278-0155  
E-mail: [jj.decoteau@gmail.com](mailto:jj.decoteau@gmail.com)