



North Dakota House of Representatives

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Testimony in Support of House Bill 1199 with Amendment

Good Afternoon Chairman Schauer and Members of the Committee,

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak today in strong support of House Bill No. 1199, a bill that addresses the critical need for a coordinated response to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) in our state.

This bill recognizes the alarming disparity in the rates of missing and murdered Indigenous people, particularly women and girls, and seeks to implement solutions that respect the sovereignty of tribal nations while ensuring justice and safety for all North Dakotans. The MMIP Taskforce established by this bill would identify and dismantle the jurisdictional barriers that impede timely investigations and create a centralized repository for missing persons' data. These are significant steps toward greater accountability and transparency in addressing this crisis.

Quick example of why this is needed and important. This fall a young girl (about 14 years old) left school with an older man who happened to have background that included sexual violence. They hadn't heard from her and she wasn't answering her phone. Her family and friends were worried and scared for her. Our tribal search and rescue jumped into action immediately but due to the area - we had little cell service, no Wi-Fi. What we did have was plenty of people to help search. They were all waiting for directions on what to do - where to go.

Learning this, I had decided to head to the headquarters deep in the tress of the Turtle Mountains. Very close to the Canada border. Once I got there, I talked with the Fire Chief and asked if there was anything I can do to help. He said we are just waiting for a cell phone ping. The feds were working on it. Now nothing against federal officers but in my opinion and from experience - when the feds get involved more often than not - everything goes silent. So I wasn't a fan of just sitting and waiting for someone else to do something.

It was starting to get dark and cold and we had some tips that she and the man where on the run - catching rides but was possibly still within the reservation boundaries. We also had tips that they were on their way to Fargo or Minnesota. I knew there had to be more we can do than just sit here. I called the one person I knew who could get things rolling. My brother Scott who used to be Indian Affairs Commission Executive Director. Within an hour we had the North Dakota highway patrol on their way with a bloodhound, more heatseeking drones, and more support for searching and coordination and the state also working on pinging their phones.

With the extra support and resources I'm happy to report that the young girl was found along with the man. It was that incident that showed me we need more communication, collaboration. There's a lot of great work being done but if we don't know how to communicate or have procedures in place for situations like this and others like it - we will continue to have our Missing and Murdered Indigenous People numbers rise.

As of this morning there are 20 Indigenous people missing from North Dakota. Four that have gone missing since January 1, 2025. All under the age of 18. Of the 20 - there are only 7 that have photographs uploaded to their entries.

Requiring interagency collaboration among tribal, state, and local governments, the taskforce addresses the historic gaps that have too often left Indigenous families without answers and without justice. Furthermore, the bill's emphasis on demographic data will help identify systemic patterns and solutions.

However, I believe the bill could be strengthened through an amendment I am proposing. This amendment seeks to broaden the representation within the advisory board to include tribal representation from each tribe. As you may know, each tribe is distinct and what could work for one may not work for another. I've also added the Executive Director of the Indian Affairs Commission.

The importance of these additions cannot be overstated. By adopting this amendment, we demonstrate that this legislature is serious about creating real change and delivering justice to the families and communities who have long fought for answers.

In closing, this bill and the proposed amendment represent an opportunity for North Dakota to lead in addressing the MMIP crisis. Together, we can create systems of accountability, empower tribal nations, and restore faith in justice for families who have been waiting far too long.

I urge the committee to support House Bill No. 1199, with the amendment, and take this vital step toward justice and safety for all of North Dakota's communities.

Miigwech, Thank you and with that I'm am happy to stand for any questions.