

**Testimony of Chairwoman Lonna Street**  
**Sixty-Ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota**  
**Regarding House Bill 1199**

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Lonna Street, and I am the proud Chairwoman of the Spirit Lake Nation. I stand before you today not just as a leader of my people but as a voice for those who can no longer speak for themselves—our missing brothers and sisters.

Across our tribal communities, people are disappearing into silence while their families, friends and loved ones are left in the dark—searching, grieving, and begging for answers. The pain of not knowing where your loved one is or whether they are alive or gone forever is a pain that never goes away. The not knowing crushes your spirit creating a wound that never heals.

In my community, we have experienced such loss far too many times. Most recently we have lost Jemini Posey and Isaac Hunt. Jemini was a 21-year-old mother with a bright future and a family that depended on her. Isaac was a vibrant young man full of potential that may never be realized. Both people were taken from us before their time. These people, these young lives are important. They matter, their families matter, and we cannot let them become yet another faceless or nameless statistic.

As tribal leader it has been beyond difficult for me to have no answers for these families. It has been beyond difficult for me to bear witness to a system that failed Jemini, a system that failed Isaac, a system that failed their families and failed our community. When Jemini and Isaac went missing the systemic responses that should have been in place simply were not.

When Jemini and Isaac disappeared, there were no emergency alerts, no immediate state assistance, no coordinated response. Instead, there was silence—silence from the federal and state agencies with the power to act, silence from the systems that should have mobilized. It took four long days for the FBI to even respond. That is four days too many. Delays cost lives. Hours turn into days, and as time stretches on, hope begins to fade.

We don't just face a lack of urgency; we face barriers at every turn.

Through our trust relationship with the United States, the Spirit Lake Tribe currently relies upon the Bureau of Indian Affairs(BIA), a federal agency, to provide primary first response to our crimes and reports of missing persons but the BIA has historically and consistently failed to provide enough officers, sufficient training and sufficient resources. Our BIA law enforcement officers are stretched thin, underfunded, and overwhelmed. The cases involving Jemini and Isaac demonstrated to us the obvious communication breakdowns between the Bureau and the FBI when it comes to missing persons cases and responses. With two primary federal law enforcement agencies lacking clear response to missing persons cases, the Tribe was left to respond with very little support or direction from the very agencies designated to serve our community.

Additionally, we know that having federal, state and tribal law enforcement responding to on reservation crimes can lead to jurisdictional confusion, slower response times or no response at all. Justice system professionals often operate within their own silos creating enormous systemic cracks. Cracks that people like Jemini and Issac can be lost in if we do not act to improve systemic responses, use collaboration as a tool, and provide our first responders with the resources and support they need to adequately respond in times of crisis.

For the families of the missing, for the families of the murdered we must do better. For Jemini's young daughter who has lived an entire year without her mother, we must do better. For Isaac's family and friends who spend every day wondering where he might be, how he went missing, what might have happened to him, we must do better. We must draw upon our collective humanity and take the steps to ensure no person, no family bear the indescribable pain of being left to wonder, being left to search, of being left without answers.

### **House Bill 1199 Comments and Suggested Amendments**

House Bill 1199 gives us a chance to do better. Like any bill it provides a means all of us to do better and that can only happen if we share in a genuine commitment to improving the lives of Indigenous people, the safety of tribal communities and to serving all families in North Dakota who deserve better. House Bill 1199 provides a means to support the development of implementation of important and tangible programs and services which can capture important data, improve our crisis responses, while coordinating and enhancing first response resources.

House Bill 1199 can be a means to implement important initiatives within our tribal communities that go far beyond task force efforts. The House Bill could serve as a means to provide for additional, and possibly life saving measures to be implemented.

After reviewing the draft legislation, there are some measures that I suggest be supported through this legislation:

1. **The creation of tribal emergency alert systems.** When someone goes missing in our communities, every second matters. A tribal emergency alert system ensures that information is shared quickly and with urgency. We have seen the impact of statewide

response tools like AMBER or Silver Alerts but having one specific to tribal alerts brings heightened awareness to the missing and murdered within our tribal communities ensuring that information is shared across jurisdictional and geographic boundaries. Imagine the power of an immediate alert—a message that mobilizes law enforcement, emergency responders, and communities within moments. A message that alerts first responders to Indian Country crisis so they all know and understand their roles and responsibilities. This system could be the difference between finding someone or not. This system can help us to improve outcomes so that children like Jemini’s daughter do not have to live with the absence of their mother.

With funds provided through Section 3 of House Bill 1199 combined state, county, and 911 taxes applicable to Indian country residents, money should not be an obstacle to implementing a lifesaving emergency alert system in every community, tribal or otherwise. This is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The time to act is now. Waiting isn’t just unacceptable—it can be deadly and we have the ability to ensure that no family has to wait in silence, wondering if help will ever come.

## **2. Funding for Tribal Law Enforcement**

Our officers are fighting this battle with empty hands. They need training, equipment, and resources to respond quickly and effectively. This bill can ensure sustainable funding and ongoing funding to support the development and enhancement of crisis planning, partnerships and equipment—not just for one year, but for the long term.

## **3. Support for State-Tribal partnerships.**

The bill can also support formal agreements, such as memorandums of understanding,

that allow state agencies to step in immediately during a crisis when time is critical.

Whether it's search and rescue teams, forensic specialists, or emergency responders, tribal nations cannot and should not fight this alone.

**4. Funds to develop mental health support for families.**

The families of the missing are left to navigate their grief and despair without support.

This is a trauma that ripples through generations. We need culturally appropriate counseling and mental health services for these families and communities. This house bill can support the development of such services as part of a comprehensive crisis response plan or initiative.

**Beyond the specific measures that House Bill 1199 might support, there needs to be accountability and transparency regarding the implementation of the law and the overall responses to missing or murdered indigenous persons.** By developing clear benchmarks and public reporting we can ensure that the spirit of House Bill 1199 is met and that those charged with implementing provisions of this law are accountable for the work done. Additionally, when capturing data, it is important that specific data points including the number of cases of missing indigenous persons being reported, the number of such cases that are solved, and any barriers that may be hindering resolution be captured. The people of North Dakota deserve to know that progress is being made and including more specific data points to ensure there is accountability.

**Closing Comments**

It is my sincere hope that House Bill 1199 be passed with the sense of urgency that it deserves. Every day that passes without action is a missed opportunity to heal a family, to provide answers, to bring our missing home. For the mothers, fathers, children and loved ones of a missing person

each day brings new questions, each day brings few answers, each day brings more anguish. This is about our collective humanity—it is about doing what is right and just. Indigenous lives should not be treated as an afterthought and when our people are missing their lives and their families should be treated with the same dignity, respect, urgency, and action as any other citizen of the state and country.

As legislators we have the ability to demonstrate what and who we value in the language of the laws that we pass. What does it say about us if we allow our people to disappear without a fight? What does it say if we let the same broken systems continue to fail our communities? This is not just about a house bill—the actions we as legislators take towards protecting our people is our civic duty and our moral obligation.

Today as you reflect on this house bill, as you reflect upon our missing persons, and as you reflect upon our collective humanity, I implore you to do your part to prioritize these cases and improving our systemic responses. I call upon you to remember the people and not just the statistics. Remember Jemini, remember Isaac, remember that their loved ones continue each day without the answers they deserve. I ask you to do whatever you can to work alongside our tribal communities to take the necessary steps to be better and to do better. Do not let another family grieve in silence because the systems failed them.

I encourage you all to pass House Bill 1199 with the urgency and seriousness it deserves. Fund it fully. Implement it effectively. In doing so you will send a message that you value all people in the state of North Dakota, including the indigenous people. I doing so it will send a message that the state of North Dakota is willing to be a part of developing systems that provide protection, justice, and hope to all citizens.

Thank you. I am ready to answer any questions you may have.