

**HOUSE GOVERNMENT AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE AUSTEN SCHAUER, CHAIR
JANUARY 30, 2025**

**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1274**

Chairman Schauer and members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, I am Colby Braun, Director of the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR). Today, I submit this verbal and written testimony in support of House Bill 1274, which proposes to add state correctional officers to the public safety retirement plan.

All law enforcement and corrections team members in all state agencies and political subdivisions are in the public safety retirement plan, with one exception. Only state correctional officers with the ND DOCR are not currently in the public safety retirement plan. This bill is solely about parity and ensuring all public safety professionals who sacrifice so much and put their personal safety at risk every day for public safety in ND, receive the same benefits, including retirement. This bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation from the DOCR's perspective this session. In addition, Governor Armstrong included funding for this bill in his budget recommendation.

Corrections is very difficult and dangerous work. According to the 2011 Florida Mortality Study by the Florida State Fraternal Order of Police, on average, law enforcement and correctional officers die 12 years earlier than the general population. In other words, law enforcement and correctional officers live to around 62 years compared to 74 years for the general population. Other studies show a life expectancy of 59 for law enforcement and correctional officers compared to 77 for general population. Given their shorter life expectancy, public safety professionals, which includes state correctional officers, do not have a lot of time to enjoy a much-earned retirement. In addition, state correctional officers

also work in dangerous environments that put their health at risk, just like law enforcement officers and correctional officers in county and regional jails in ND. Studies show that correctional officers experience depression (25% vs. 7%), PTSD (27% vs. 4%), and suicide (7% vs. 5%) at much higher rates than the national population. DOCR correctional officers work hard and sacrifice to keep our communities safe every day by working in our state's prisons.

We anticipate between 450 and 500 total DOCR team members moving into the public safety retirement plan if this bill passes. Only positions which require a current correctional officer certification or equivalent, would be eligible for inclusion. Chairman Schauer and members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, we ask that you support House Bill 1274 which adds state or DOCR correctional officers to the public safety retirement plan. I will stand for questions.