

**HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE LAWRENCE KLEMIN, CHAIR
JANUARY 8, 2025**

**CHARLIE HEDDEN, GRANTS AND CONTRACTS MANAGER
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1061**

Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee, my name is Charlie Hedden and I stand before you today as a representative of the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's Victim Services Team. I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to discuss House Bill 1061 and the changes it proposes regarding legislative language pertaining to victim notifications. The Victims services team assist victims when the offending individual has been sentenced to the custody of the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Services include victim notifications about movements of inmates and updating victims about parole or pardon review, release to parole or probation, Community Placement Program, Work/Education release, expiration of sentence or revocation of sentence, death and escape. The team also provides community and agency education of victims' rights and federal VOCA funds, and restorative justice service such as victim-offender conferencing.

As we examine the current framework, it becomes increasingly clear that it does not adequately address the nuanced needs of victims who have experienced profound trauma. House Bill 1061 seeks to amend the requirement that custodial authorities must provide notifications to all victims, regardless of

their registration status. I am in favor for this change, as it recognizes the complexity of victims' experiences and their right to choose how they engage with the criminal justice system.

It is essential to understand that not all victims wish to be involved in ongoing communication regarding offenders. Many individuals have expressed that receiving updates, particularly those that may trigger painful memories, can exacerbate their trauma. Our current mandate to communicate with victims, irrespective of their registration, often leads to unintended consequences, including additional stress and emotional duress. The act of reliving their trauma with each notification can hinder their healing process, making it critical that we respect their autonomy in this matter.

By allowing victims the choice to register for communication, we empower them to reclaim some control over their lives—a vital step in their recovery journey. Victims should not be burdened with the anxiety of unsolicited updates that bring back memories they are trying to move beyond. Instead, we should be providing a system that prioritizes their well-being and respects their individual needs.

In crafting this legislation, we have an opportunity to align our practices with the principles of victim-centered care. By ensuring that we are only legislatively required to communicate with registered victims, we can foster an environment that honors their preferences and acknowledges the diverse responses to trauma.

As we consider the implications of this bill, please reflect on the voices of those we serve. Many victims have shared their experiences of feeling overwhelmed and re-traumatized by mandatory notifications. We have a responsibility to listen to their concerns and adapt policies to better serve their needs.

In conclusion, I support House Bill 1061, as it represents a significant shift toward a more compassionate and victim-centered approach within our justice system. By allowing victims to choose their level of engagement, we not only uphold their rights but also contribute to a more effective and empathetic response to the needs of those who have suffered.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter. I look forward to your support for House Bill 1061 and the positive changes it will bring to our community. I will stand for any questions.