



North Dakota Native Vote
919 S 7th Street
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Bismarck, ND 58504

February 2, 2025

Testimony of Erika Red Tomahawk

Tribal-State Policy Coordinator, North Dakota Native Vote

In support for HB 1535

Dear Chairman Klemin and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Erika Red Tomahawk, and I am writing to you today in strong support of House Bill 1535, a critical measure that would establish the Feather Alert System in North Dakota. I come before you as a young Native American woman and an advocate for Indigenous communities across our state.

For far too long, Native American people—particularly women and youth—have gone missing at alarmingly high rates, often without an immediate and coordinated response. The numbers paint a devastating picture:

- In 2016, the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) recorded 5,712 cases of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, yet the federal missing persons database, NamUs, reflected only 116 cases. (Source: [Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis | Indian Affairs](#))
- Between 2012 and 2021, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children reported that nearly 3,000 Native American children were reported missing across 44 states, 55% of whom were female, with the majority aged 15 to 17 years old. (Source: [Missing and Murdered Indigenous People \(MMIP\): Overview of Recent Research, Legislation, and Selected Issues for Congress](#))

Right here in North Dakota, the crisis is just as pressing. As of early 2025, several Indigenous individuals reported missing in 2024 remain unaccounted for. Among them are Mason Cree, a 15-year-old boy missing since September 5, 2024, and Isaac James Hunt, a 28-year-old man missing since March 8, 2024. (Source: [North Dakota Missing Indigenous Persons Database](#))

A staggering 40% of all missing persons in North Dakota were Indigenous as of April 2024, despite Native Americans comprising only a small percentage of the state's population. (Source: [MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN](#))



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This is not just a crisis—it is an injustice. House Bill 1535 will provide a necessary and urgent solution by establishing the Feather Alert System, ensuring that when an Indigenous person goes missing, law enforcement, media, and the public mobilize immediately through a statewide emergency notification system. This bill will:

- Provide a rapid response framework for law enforcement to issue alerts.
- Utilize the Emergency Alert System and other public channels to broadcast critical information.
- Ensure culturally competent implementation, including alerts in tribal languages when needed.
- Foster coordination between tribal, state, and federal agencies to bridge the gaps in response and reporting.

This legislation is not just about policy—it is about protecting lives. It is a promise to Indigenous families that their missing loved ones will no longer be forgotten or ignored. It is a commitment that when someone goes missing, every possible resource will be deployed to bring them home.

I urge this committee to give a **"Do Pass" recommendation on House Bill 1535** and ensure that North Dakota becomes a leader in addressing the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP). This is an opportunity to take meaningful action—to stand for justice, to uphold accountability, and to ensure that no more families are left searching in silence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Erika Red Tomahawk