

**HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
REPRESENTATIVE LAWRENCE KLEMIN, CHAIR
FEBRUARY 5, 2025**

**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1549**

Chair Klemin and members of the House Judiciary 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 1549.

Our department employs evidence-based practices tailored to the specific needs of individuals in our system to support successful reentry. This critical work is made possible by the dedication of our staff, as well as our ongoing collaboration with state agencies and community organizations. While we have made significant strides, we recognize that there are still areas requiring improvement—particularly in enhancing reentry programming at county, regional, and tribal correctional facilities, addressing racial disparities, and expanding housing availability. House Bill 1549 is designed to address these gaps and improve outcomes for those transitioning back into our communities.

Section 1 establishes a correctional facility grant program, which will allocate funding to county, regional, and tribal correctional facilities to expand access to evidence-based programming. This funding will provide vital resources to enhance programming options and strengthen reentry planning at the local level. It is essential that individuals receive support throughout the reentry process to ensure their successful reintegration into the community. **Section 8** includes an appropriation of \$1.5 million to the DOCR to administer this program.

Section 2 of the bill relates to facilitating the process of obtaining identification and Medicaid assistance prior to an individual's release. These initiatives are currently being carried out in coordination with the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health and Human

Services, and the Human Service Zones. Ensuring that individuals have identification and access to healthcare upon their release is a key step in helping them successfully reintegrate.

Section 4 proposes the creation of a Native American Reentry Program, acknowledging the racial disparities within the population sentenced to incarceration or probation under the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR). The DOCR recognizes the critical need for culturally responsive programming to better serve Native American individuals. In response, we have collaborated with South Central Foundation and F5 to launch the Akisni Warrior Lodge (AWL) at the James River Correctional Center. AWL is a culturally based recidivism reduction program founded on the belief that change is possible, with healing encompassing the body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

The Justice Reinvestment Initiative Reentry Study Work Group further emphasized the disproportionate representation of Native American individuals in correctional facilities, under community supervision, and among those experiencing revocation of supervision. The proposed Native American Reentry Program would offer culturally specific interventions tailored to the distinct needs of Native American individuals, building upon the foundational support provided by AWL. This initiative would be implemented through a partnership between the DOCR, representatives from each federally recognized tribe, and the Indian Affairs Commission, and would involve the appointment of a Native American liaison to operate within the department regarding parole and probation services. **Section 9** includes an appropriation of \$25,000 to support the program's development, including programming, travel, and operating expenses.

Section 5 creates a task force to address housing barriers faced by individuals on probation, parole, or those released from custody. Access to stable, affordable housing is a fundamental need, yet many individuals face significant challenges in securing housing, especially those with felony or sex offense convictions. By addressing these barriers, we can better support individuals as they reintegrate into their communities.

House Bill 1549 addresses key areas of need that will strengthen reentry efforts and enhance community reintegration. I ask that you support this proposed legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration. I stand for any questions.