

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Phil Davis, and I am the Workforce Services Director at Job Service North Dakota. Additionally, I am a member of the Reentry Study Workgroup that provided input to the final report that was published by the Crime and Justice Institute. I am providing this testimony in support of HB1549.

Individuals who are justice-involved were identified by the Workforce Development Council as a population who experience barriers to entering the workforce, including the life-long impact of a criminal conviction on their record. As of 2023, North Dakota averaged 1,327 prisoner releases each year. Without a steady paycheck allowing for basic needs to be met, such as housing and food, many ex-offenders return to the prisons as indicated by North Dakota's recidivism rate of 38% in 2023.

Justice-involved individuals are a target group to fill in-demand positions in skilled trades, manufacturing, transportation, and a wide variety of other industries. Without tapping into this labor pool and preparing these individuals for the workforce, employers will continue to have difficulty filling in-demand positions.

As I mentioned, individuals with criminal records, especially the formerly incarcerated, face enormous barriers to employment. During the 68th Legislative Assembly, Job Service North Dakota requested and received a \$640,000 appropriation for two years to provide services to justice-involved individuals to help them gain and maintain employment upon release. In partnership with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR), the program provides the opportunity for individuals to receive 1:1 service including access to training programs, employment services, referrals as needed, and funding for support services to ensure individuals are employment ready. The goal for the two-year pilot program was to prepare 300 individuals to re-enter the workforce. To be successful in the program, individuals must be accountable to the program requirements and obtain and retain a job for six months.

Using 18 months of data, Job Service has received 308 referrals from DOCR and completed 230 intakes for those who have been released. Currently, there are 98 active participants with an 81% employment rate. Individuals who have completed the program are earning an average of \$12,655.00 per quarter. Of those who have been referred to the program, only 5% have been reincarcerated. The reason I share these statistics is because bringing workforce services into the Reentry Phase of these discussions is an enormous part of allowing individuals to successfully transition back into the workforce, become self-sufficient, and contribute back to North Dakota's economy.

Job Service North Dakota has strong working relationships with employers and our industry partners in every region of the state. We understand the workforce challenges within the state, and we support the need for growth of serving Justice Involved individuals who can make an impact if given second or sometimes a third chance of getting back into the workforce. Job Service North Dakota does recognize the more successful we are at diversion, deflection and reentry, the better we are able to fill our open jobs in North Dakota.

In closing, Job Service North Dakota supports HB1549 and would like to thank the Reentry Study Workgroup for allowing us to be part of this important work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.