



**Testimony on HB 1549**  
**North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers**  
**5 February, 2025**  
**House Judiciary Committee**

Chairman Klemin and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

The North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-ND) supports HB 1549 and the establishment of necessary resources to expand re-entry programs in the state of North Dakota. HB 1549 supports individuals who are incarcerated and their successful integration back into the community. These efforts require coordination, funding, and culturally competent services, all of which are included in the bill. These programs offer the individual re-entering into society further dignity and empowerment to be successful outside of the criminal justice system—values that are an important part of the NASW Code of Ethics.

This bill addresses common challenges that contribute to an individual's ability to successfully reintegrate into society. Throughout North Dakota, trends in recidivism define the need to refine the criminal justice system. While the Department of Corrections partnership with the F5 project has reduced recidivism rates, they remain fairly high at 41.2%, displaying the ongoing need for re-entry reform efforts.

Incarceration has detrimental effects on the mental health of individuals. Upon release, it is common to experience increased feelings of anxiety, isolation, and depression. Support during the reintegration process is pivotal for addressing an individual's emotional well-being. A person who was recently released can better sustain their mental health through support, leading to empowerment, resiliency, self-advocacy skills, and the ability to identify their goals or needs. Additionally, a positive state of mental health and identified support helps individuals feel a sense of belonging and support from their community, increasing their desire to contribute to their community.

When individuals who were recently released have access to necessary tools to support them, they are less likely to reoffend. These reform strategies will ultimately benefit and transform our communities by aiding in crime prevention, reducing criminal justice costs, and maintaining familial structures. NASW-ND supports legislative efforts that promote social justice for individuals within the criminal justice system.

NASW-ND urges the members of the House Judiciary Committee to vote DO PASS on HB 1549, as its favorable provisions will dismantle systemic barriers to successful re-integration for individuals who were recently released.

Respectfully,

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North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers