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Wednesday, February 5, 2025
HB 1549
House Judiciary Committee

Mister Chairman and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Sister Kathleen Atkinson. I serve as the director of *Ministry on the Margins* and have been part of the ND Reentry Study Work Group. I speak in favor of HB 1549 to strengthen collaborative and early support for men and women in reentry from prison.

We know them in the prison before and after Sunday worship...coming up to say that they are being released in the next months but have no place to go. Sometimes able to articulate the huge transition from living institutionally their entire life - often family to military to prison. Sometimes coming from an addictive and dysfunctional family, but seeing no other alternative available, especially if returning home.

We know them when they come into the Ministry – by the look of panic, the khaki pants and khaki jackets over a white T-shirt. Newly released, they have no place to go but us – less than a mile walk from the prison gates. It is not uncommon for an individual to have a one or two week wait until meeting with their PO; it's a limbo ready to be filled by old friends waiting to take advantage of someone before they can get connected to support.

HB 1549 addresses a variety of challenges which lead to failure in reentry and thus return to incarceration. HB 1549 promotes success and encourages immediacy, collaboration, and innovation through:

- Collaborating with other agencies to provide necessary documents for assistance at the earliest possible opportunity rather than beginning the process once a person is released.
- Creating relationships with housing stakeholders to provide housing for justice-involved individuals upon release rather than after months of homelessness.
- Identifying unique strengths and challenges inherent in the Native American community and implementing them collaboratively with the DOCR and ND Tribes.
- Providing grant funding avenues to encourage innovative responsiveness in local jails, reentry programs, and DOCR system partners.

Thank you for your consideration.