

Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee, my name is Allison Wanner, and I am a Licensed Clinical Addiction Counselor at the Southwest Multi County Correctional Center (SWMCCC) Community Treatment Program. I am here today to talk about SB2128 and how it would negatively impact my current clients. SWMCCC currently has a contracted program with the ND DOCR to provide transitional services including work release and substance abuse treatment for residents moving back to Western North Dakota.

Work release inmates in our program are required to maintain employment, complete necessary chemical dependency evaluations, and follow recommended programming which help them successfully reintegrate into society. Without such programs, many face barriers like job rejections, housing instability, social stigma and increased the risk of reoffending.

Facilities in the state are already at capacity or over capacity. So my question is, where are they going to go? New facilities will need to be built, but that takes time and money. The new HRCC would cost of \$166,000,000. Of the 230 inmates that would need to be sent back, 70 of them are females. They would need temporary housing until the new Heart River Correctional Center (HRCC) is built. This new facility would not be built until October 2027, that is over 2 years away. In addition, that would leave 160 men that would need temporary housing as well. They would be removed not only from my work release program, but other transitional programming across the state. They would need to be placed in secure temporary housing such as jails, awaiting the approval a new male facility, which could cost the state another \$498,000,000. This is a concern and something to strongly think about if SB2128 were to be implemented.

Data from the 2 years that our program has been in existence shows that 20 clients have been paroled, 20 clients have been able to establish stable housing prior to release and 19 clients left the program employed. Out of the 20 clients, 4 have received new legal charges, none of which were violent.

So how would this negatively impact our current clients on the work release program? Returning inmates who have secured stable employment and are actively saving for their release would significantly hinder their progress. Successful reintegration into society is critical, and removing access to work release programs could have profound negative effects on their mental and physical well-being, as well as their behavior. These individuals were previously deemed trustworthy enough to participate in transitional programs, and revoking that opportunity may lead to feelings of abandonment and distrust. Many inmates have experienced significant trauma, and disrupting their reintegration process could exacerbate these challenges, ultimately increasing the risk of recidivism.

I'd like to end my testimony with a few statements from current and past clients that participated in the work release program at SWMCCC County Jail:

“I want to share my story with the committee as someone who has experienced both sides of the correctional system. I once worked as a correctional officer at the North Dakota State Penitentiary (NDSP), however, due to poor choices surrounding my struggle with alcohol, that I do take complete responsibility for, I now have found myself on the other side of the bars. Today, I am under the supervision of the DOCR, and participating in the SWMCCC work release program. This program has been extremely helpful in helping me obtain opportunities to reintegrate back into society. It has given me the opportunity to rebuild my work ethic, gain financial stability and repair relationships that may have been broken, due to my struggles with alcohol. It has also given me a strong sense of purpose. Through work release, I have been able to reconnect with responsibilities, establish positive routines, and regain the confidence in my ability to be a productive member of society. The impact of the program goes far beyond employment. It has helped me stay focused on my recovery, providing me with a support system within my community due to the ability to attend AA and NA meetings on a regular basis, and allowed me to make amends for my past mistakes. It has also given me hope—something I had lost for a long time. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity the DOCR has given me, to participate in the work release program, complete my treatment that I needed and to regain stability again, so I can move forward from my past. I no longer allow the past to define who I am, and with the work release program I am now creating a foundation in which I am defining my future and my future successes. The work release program that I am part of gives individuals like me, who was a successful member in society, working for the state, a second chance, but also helps contribute to a safer and stronger community. It has opened doors for me, to make changes for my future, in which revolves around being more involved in the recovery community and possibly even making it a future career for me”.

“The work release program is very beneficial to all inmates who want to positively change their lives. There are numerous companies in our community that help out with a variety of different jobs and skills in the workforce. It helped me get my foot in the door to re-enter society with all kinds of different programs. Each program is specific to your needs. It also helps with being able to save funds and prepare for release upon completion of sentencing. The ladies at SWMCCC are very helpful with anything and everything you can expect to need before your release. Such as community programs like NA and AA and connects to felon friendly place to live, peer support and guidance. As an ex-convict I was grateful for the opportunity to participate in the program. It helped the transition from jail to the community successfully and I was able to prosper. Without it I do not know how I would have been able to get where I am at today”.

In closing, I want to thank you for allowing me to testify and I ask that you move a do not pass on SB 2128.

