

Good afternoon, Chairman Longmuir and members of the Political Subdivisions committee. My name is Ron Jurgens, and I am the Walsh County Sheriff.

I am here today to testify in support of HB 1197.

I have been the Sheriff for the last 10 years. I have worked for the Walsh County Sheriff's Office since February of 1991. During this time, I have worked in various capacities with the Sheriff's Office. I was a Patrol Deputy, a Sergeant, and the Chief Deputy before I was elected the Sheriff of Walsh County.

Once elected as Sheriff, my duties encompassed the jail administrator for the Walsh County Correctional Facility. In that capacity I have seen various things that are problematic inside the jail.

A little bit about the Law Enforcement/ Jail building: The building was built and then dedicated on November 25, 1975. That was 50 years ago. According to jail experts the life span of a jail is no more than 40 years.

The condition of the facility is poor and failing. Over the last 15 years, the plumbing has become an almost daily concern. The pipes in the building are literally crumbling and most of the floor drains have collapsed. The plumbing was poured into the concrete floor, making it impossible to replace without removing the concrete floors. We have been forced to replace multiple sinks and toilets in the jail over the last 10 years due to serious malfunctions.

The basement of the Law Enforcement Center has had mold issues which required us to hire a company to come and treat the mold issues. Along with that, walls needed to be removed and then rebuilt after the mold was treated.

There is also a serious problem with the lack of space in the jail. According to Department of Corrections standards we are allowed to house only 16 inmates in our facility and because of that we chose to only house males because of our space limitations. There have been many times when we did not have enough room for all our Walsh County inmates, and do not have space for the many programs we would like to offer to our inmates.

When we do not have room for the inmates, we have no choice but to transport them to other jails throughout North Dakota. We have gone as far away as Williston ND because of the lack of space in any of the local County Jails. We do not know from day to day which facility will have room to house our inmates as most of the other county jails are also at maximum capacity.

When our Deputies are transporting, they are out of the county and are not here to keep us safe.

Over the last few years, it has become painfully apparent that the current Walsh County Jail and Law Enforcement Center has served its purpose and now needs to be replaced.

This bill would help us with accomplishing our goal in Walsh County to build a new jail to provide our citizens the criminal justice they expect.

I urge you to support HB 1197. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be happy to stand for any questions.

Ronald Jurgens

Walsh County Sheriff