

Testimony of Representative Lisa Finley-DeVilleville

In support of House Bill 1521

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee, my name is Representative Lisa Finley-DeVilleville, representing District 4 A, which includes the MHA Nation. I testify in support of House Bill 1521, relating to motor vehicle excise tax exemption for tribal governments.

I support the passage of HB 1521 as it is vital to improving the economic opportunities and quality of life for enrolled tribal members, particularly those living on reservations in North Dakota.

Many households within enrolled tribal nations are low-income families, making purchasing a motor vehicle a significant financial challenge. Exempting tribal members from the motor vehicle excise tax would help make vehicle ownership more affordable for these families, who often rely on personal transportation to access essential services like healthcare, education, and employment.

In North Dakota, most tribal reservations are located more than 50 miles from the nearest motor vehicle dealership. As a result, tribal members often face long delays in receiving vehicles, sometimes waiting for weeks or even months for delivery. This creates additional hardship for individuals and families already facing barriers to accessing necessary services.

Many enrolled tribal members live off the reservation, relocating to larger North Dakota cities for employment and educational opportunities. These members contribute to the state's workforce and economy and providing them with more affordable access to vehicles supports their continued participation in North Dakota's growth.

For tribal members who remain on the reservation, having reliable transportation is crucial for accessing healthcare, including doctor's appointments and other essential services. Many tribal members are required to travel long distances to receive medical care, and the ability to purchase a vehicle without the added burden of excise taxes would make this process significantly easier.

Additionally, it's important to note that neighboring states like Montana, South Dakota, and Minnesota provide similar sales tax waivers or exemptions for tribal members. Extending this benefit to tribal members in North Dakota would bring consistency to our region and demonstrate fairness and respect for the sovereignty of Native American tribes.

As a member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, I can also point to the significant contributions our tribe has made to North Dakota's economy, particularly through oil and gas taxes. These contributions have helped build the state's Legacy Fund, which now holds billions of dollars. We have been proud stewards of this land for centuries, and North Dakota is our home.

I urge the committee to give HB 1521 a Do-pass recommendation as it will help ensure that tribal members have the resources necessary to support their communities, while also recognizing the important contributions and sovereignty of Native American tribes in North Dakota.

Thank you for your time and consideration.