



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

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Good morning, Chairman Ruby and members of the Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 1521 today. For the record I am Collette Brown, Representative from District 9 and I am honored to introduce this bill that came from a constituent and colleague.

This bill addresses a critical issue of fairness and equity for enrolled tribal members. North Dakota is home to several federally recognized tribes, including the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (Three Affiliated Tribes), the Spirit Lake Tribe, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, and the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate. These tribes have a rich history and deep cultural significance in our state.

Vehicle ownership is essential for accessing employment, education, healthcare, and other vital services, especially in rural and often underserved areas. This exemption will alleviate some of the financial burdens associated with vehicle ownership, promoting greater economic stability and mobility for tribal members. Many tribal members face unique economic challenges, and providing a motor vehicle excise tax exemption acknowledges these difficulties.

As of the 2020 Census, per google, it is estimated that over 12,000 enrolled tribal members of North Dakota's federally recognized tribes reside off their respective reservations. These are individuals who remain deeply connected to their tribes, their culture, community, familial ties and should not be excluded from the benefits intended for their community.

Many assume that tribal members voluntarily choose to live off-reservation, but many are often forced to move due to economic disparities, lack of job opportunities, inadequate housing, and limited healthcare access on reservations.

The 5% vehicle excise tax is an undue burden on tribal members who are already facing economic hardship. Under current law, tribal members living on their reservation are exempt from this tax, yet those living just outside reservation boundaries—often out of necessity—are forced to pay it.

This creates a system where a tribal member's tax status is determined not by their identity, but by their address. This is an inequitable standard that punishes North Dakota Native individuals simply because they have been displaced.

The passage of HB 1521 is not just about tax exemptions, it is about justice, equity, and removing barriers that disproportionately impact Native citizens.

As legislators, we have a responsibility to correct outdated policies that create economic hardships for those who have already endured generations of systemic barriers.

By extending vehicle excise tax exemptions to all tribal members of the five North Dakota tribes regardless of residence, our state would send a strong message of goodwill, the support of economic equity, and to build a stronger, more cooperative relationship with Tribes. This policy could serve as a model for broader state-tribal partnerships.

I urge you, Chairman Ruby and committee members, to stand on the right side of history and vote a Do Pass on HB 1521. Let us be a state that leads with fairness and ensures that North Dakota's first peoples are not penalized for circumstances beyond their control.

Lastly Chairman Ruby, I have an amendment to this bill, the amendment was a recommendation from a fellow sponsor. This amendment removes the retroactive requirement. I respectfully request that you move to accept the amendment as presented.

Thank you for your time and consideration.