

To: North Dakota Legislature-69th Legislative Session
From: Travis Bateman
Date: 3/6/2025

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF:

SENATE BILL # 2277

**FALLEN PEACE OFFICERS MEMORIAL HIGHWAY DESIGNATION
OF NORTH DAKOTA HIGHWAY 200**

Greetings Committee Chairman Ruby and committee members,

My name is Travis Bateman, and I am here today to ask the North Dakota state legislature to designate North Dakota Highway 200 as the North Dakota Fallen Peace Officers Memorial Highway.

Since before statehood as the Dakota Territory and the birth of our great state to what it is today, there have been those that have held the line between peace and chaos, justice, and anarchy. There have been brave souls that held people accountable and done right and proper within their communities.

In doing so, as of this date in time, there have been sixty-two peace officers that have been killed in the line of duty in our state according to the Officer Down Memorial Page.

I want to share with you today some of those historical sacrifices with the purpose as to why this designation would fit North Dakota and speak not only to the testaments of these fallen officers but to show how fitting of a tribute it would be. To that end it would also speak to what kind of state and society we are by showing all that we will never forget them and that in doing this they live on in memory. It is said that:

“A hero remembered, never dies.”

Growing up in North Dakota, I was raised with a strong sense of right and wrong. I remember interactions with deputies and troopers as a young boy in New Salem when they came to school to speak to us and in seeing them around town. They were the good guys, and we knew that we could always go to them for help if we needed it.

Fast forward to adulthood and coming home after military service I entered law enforcement myself. I can tell many stories of heroics and lifesaving acts that I witnessed fellow cops do. Close calls and sleepless nights wondering how on earth we did not lose an officer or have one hurt more seriously.

Unfortunately, during that same time, the streak of North Dakota having not lost an officer was shattered after fifteen years (Watford City – **Officer Keith Braddock** - 3/20/1996) when Bismarck lost **Sergeant Steven Kenner** on a domestic violence call on July 8, 2011. Then another loss on November 28, 2011, when Burleigh County lost **Deputy Bryan Sleeper** after a fight during the arrest of a drunk driver.

North Dakotans were once again reminded that though we live in a relatively safe state, that we are not immune to the violence in this world and most assuredly, our law enforcement officers are often the ones that take the brunt in keeping us safe.

Unfortunately, our state's law enforcement history has been marred by additional loss and sacrifices since 2011.

-Thursday, February 11th, 2016 our state endured the loss of **Fargo Police Officer Jason Moszer** as he and others responded to a domestic violence call. During that incident, a perimeter was set up as the threat of using firearms had been made by the barricaded suspect. Officer Moszer was then fired upon as he held a perimeter position and struck by gunfire from the suspect, killing him. The suspect would also die from this incident.

-Wednesday, January 18th, 2017 was the night North Dakota suffered the loss of **Rolette County Deputy Sheriff Colt Allery**. A stolen vehicle pursuit that ended with the remote disabling of the vehicle. The suspect then engaged the deputy and an officer in a shootout. Deputy Allery and the suspect were both killed.

-Wednesday, May 27th, 2020 saw the bravery and sacrifice of **Grand Forks Police Officer Cody Holte** as he responded to the urgent call for assistance from a deputy sheriff at an eviction when the resident opened fire with an AK-47. Officer Holte was struck down and killed in another exchange of gunfire with the shooter before return fire from other officers ultimately ended the threat.

-Friday, July 14th, 2023, in Fargo, North Dakota. We experienced one of the most violent ambushes on law enforcement to date. As four Fargo police officers worked a minor traffic collision on an urban street, a suspect that was out to cause chaos and inflict violence in the community that day, chose to target the officers at that location. As the officers worked the scene, the suspect parked his vehicle in a nearby parking lot where he then opened fire on all four of the officers and a civilian at close range.

Officer Jake Wallin, a veteran of the US Army that served in Afghanistan, still in field training and on the job for three months, was able to draw his sidearm and engage the suspect with one round before he was fatally struck in the exchange. Officer Wallin's training officer was then able to engage the suspect and after an intense exchange of gunfire, he was able to kill the shooter. Sadly, we lost Officer Wallin and two other officers on scene were severely wounded. As was a civilian.

-Our most recent heartache and loss took place in Mercer County, between Beulah and Hazen on December 6th, 2023. That evening those communities and our state lost **Deputy Sheriff Paul Martin** as he attempted to intervene in a vehicle pursuit and deploy spike strips on the fleeing suspect. The suspect crashed into Deputy Martin's patrol unit and himself and took the life of another brave peace officer holding the Thin Blue Line across our state.

That is nine peace officers since 1996 for North Dakota. I wish it were zero, but we don't have that power and only God in his divine plan can tell us why we lose these souls.

I cannot express how symbolic this designation would be for our state's fallen peace officers, the agencies impacted, and the loved ones left behind. Every time agencies must don a mourning band over their shield or star means that another peace officer has been called home. Another void is left in an agency and family. Another community is reminded just how fragile peace and safety is and, in these times, what it ultimately means to live in a safe society.

Nine is the number of times that I have witnessed the rendering of the twenty-one-gun salute, playing of Taps, and folding of our nation's flag for a fallen cop. It never gets easier and every time those bagpipes, gun volleys, and trumpets sound the emotions that reverberate through every cop standing at attention and rendering a salute is palpable. Law enforcement is one huge family, regardless of the animosity or rivalries that may exist. When that radio cracks with the words of "Officer down!" everyone rolls.

There are others here with me today to help explain and bestow upon this committee and this legislature the true statement that Senate Bill 2277 will provide. Every one of them comes from a different angle to justify and truly prove the importance of this designation and I ask that you listen intently as they have all encountered the loss of a peace officer from their respective positions.

Since this is the second hearing for this bill and the passage in the Senate you all now get to partake in helping establish this small but unique token of honor. Since the first hearing we met with reps from the North Dakota DOT about the specifics as to signage and it is worth sharing for an update on this project. At the conclusion of the meeting, the NDDOT elected to not only handle the tasks of placing anchors, setting posts, and mounting the signs for this entire project, but they also will be covering the costs for the highway designation signage, and we cannot express our appreciation enough for that. This will now require us to only have to seek funds for signs to honor individual officers.

We also have received letters of support or resolution in favor of this highway designation from the county commissions of McKenzie, Dunn, Mercer, and McLean. We felt as this moved forward that it was important to garner that local support and offer them a chance to participate in this as well and we wish to thank all of them for doing so.

Please give this bill a Do Pass recommendation and help to further remember and honor North Dakota's fallen peace officers.

I again wish to specifically recognize and thank Senator Keith Boehm for enthusiastically and wholeheartedly doing all that he has done to get this endeavor to this point and thank you to all the co-sponsors that have joined him as well. Senator Boehm has been an absolute stand up gentleman in this and a true professional that we are lucky to have here in North Dakota.

Lastly, I wish to thank Curt Olson, who recently retired from the McLean County Sheriff's Office and holds an immense knowledge and record of our state's law enforcement history as well as establishing a Peace Officers Memorial Parade each May during Police Week, Beulah Police Chief Frank Senn for assisting in getting this out to the state's police chiefs with support from their association and Burleigh County Sheriff Kelly Leben for doing the same with the state's sheriffs. And finally, to the North Dakota Peace Officers Association for their involvement in this as well.

Thank you to this committee here today for permitting me to speak before you and I stand for any questions that you may have.

Respectfully,

Travis F. Bateman

Travis F. Bateman

Former North Dakota law enforcement officer (2010-2020):

Stanley Police, Watford City Police, McKenzie County Sheriff, & Arnegard Police

United States Army, Military Police (2002-2008):

-Combat Support (Baghdad, Mosul, & Tikrit, Iraq) (2003-2004, & 2005-2006)

-Traffic Section (Ft. Carson, CO) (2006-2008)