

Good morning, esteemed members of the committee. My name is Mychal Reanne Cook. I stand before you as living proof of the transformative power of the F5 Project, a non-profit dedicated to offering a fresh start to formerly incarcerated individuals, those battling addiction, and anyone seeking housing, recovery resources, and peer support.

In 2020, facing probation, I was homeless, jobless, and utterly hopeless. I desperately needed every service the F5 Project provided. As a participant in the Free Through Recovery Program, I found, for the first time amidst my involvement with the criminal justice system, a beacon of hope. The F5 Project offered invaluable peer support and advocacy, connecting me with individuals who understood the arduous journey of rebuilding life after addiction. My care coordinator, was instrumental in my transformation. He tirelessly assisted me in securing employment, driving me to job applications and offering unwavering encouragement. With their steadfast guidance, I also found stable housing.

The impact of the F5 Project has been nothing short of transformative. I am now a junior at Dickinson State University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in addiction studies. In the spring of 2024, I achieved a 4.0 GPA, earning a place on the President's List. The F5 Project facilitated my journey from the police blotter to the President's List in just a few short years—from jobless to gainfully employed, from homeless to housed, and from hopeless to overflowing with hope.

This remarkable transformation was made possible by the Free Through Recovery and Community Connect programs, which provide critical support to individuals like myself. These programs are not merely about rehabilitation; they are about rebuilding lives and fostering a safer, more stable community.

Furthermore, I am now employed as a Peer Support Specialist for the North Dakota Brain Injury Network and a Care Coordinator for the United Way. This state's investment in my rehabilitation has yielded a return: I am now equipped to give back to my community. I respectfully request this committee to continue that investment. Supporting HB1012 will enable me, and countless others, to improve outcomes for those who desperately need a second chance.

Therefore, I urge the Senate to strongly support HB1012 and ensure continued funding for the Free Through Recovery and Community Connect programs. These programs are essential for individuals seeking a second chance and for the well-being of our community. Investing in these programs is an investment in human potential and a reduction in recidivism, which ultimately saves our state resources.

Thank you for your time and profound consideration.  
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