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March 25, 2025

North Dakota Legislative Assembly
600 E Boulevard Ave
Bismarck, ND 58505

Subject: Testimony in Support of Fully Funding Free Through Recovery and Community Connect

Dear Members of the North Dakota Legislative Assembly:

We are writing to express our strong support for the full funding of the **Free Through Recovery (FTR)** and **Community Connect (CC)** programs in North Dakota. As the Executive Leadership Team of F5 Project, the State's largest provider of Free Through Recovery and one of the largest providers of Community Connect, we have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact these programs have on individuals seeking to rebuild their lives after incarceration or treatment, overcome addiction, and reintegrate into society successfully.

Funding programs like **FTR** and **CC** results in savings to the state of North Dakota and therefore the citizens of the state. For example, in 2024, F5 Project contributed an estimated **\$10.26 million dollars** in savings through participants successfully completing FTR programming and not returning to prison.

FTR serves as a vital bridge for individuals reentering their communities by providing essential services, including housing assistance, employment support, and mental health care. Many justice-involved individuals face significant barriers upon release, and without structured support, they are at a heightened risk of recidivism. **FTR** helps break this cycle by offering tailored, evidence-based interventions that promote stability and long-term success.

Similarly, **CC** has proven to be a life-changing initiative for those struggling with addiction and behavioral health challenges. This program ensures that participants receive high-quality, individualized case management and peer support. By addressing the root causes of substance use disorders and providing recovery-focused services, **CC** reduces the risk of relapse, enhances public safety, and strengthens our communities.

FTR and **CC** are **essential** programs that contribute not only to reentry and recovery, but also to workforce. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Workforce Shortage Index – last updated in February 2025, reported North Dakota's Shortage Index to be one of the most severe in the nation – with an index rate of .30. **This means North Dakota only has 30 available workers for every 100 open jobs.** **FTR** and **CC** programming support activating hidden talent and retaining untapped talent for the many businesses who are affected by our workforce shortage.

It is hard to activate this workforce without programming like **FTR** or **CC** – and it can be expensive to the North Dakota taxpayer to continuously need to account for high recidivism. According to the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (NDDOCR), the cost to incarcerate one individual annually is \$54,000 or roughly \$148 per day. In 2024, the recidivism rate in North Dakota was 40% - a rate that F5 Project works diligently to reduce alongside the NDDOCR and through valuable programming like FTR.

In 2024, F5 Project discharged – or ended programming – for 566 participants enrolled on **FTR**. Of those discharged, 75 or 13.25% experienced recidivism – **much lower than the state’s total recidivism average of 40%**. Further, 190 discharges successfully completed FTR programming and overcame or significantly reduced the barriers that tend to encourage higher recidivism rates. Success looks like participants who have sustainable employment and housing, can meet their basic needs and more, and contribute to the overall economic health and workforce in North Dakota.

The successful completion and discharge of 190 individuals served through F5 Project on **FTR** in 2024 resulted in an estimated savings of **\$10.26 million dollars**. Our data supports information on those who successfully complete the program and does not account for those who are discharged due to no longer being eligible for FTR due to location, changes in services needed, or declining/tapering away from services. **Actual savings are likely to be higher for North Dakota.**

The continued funding of these programs is not just a moral imperative but also a fiscally responsible decision. Research consistently shows that investments in rehabilitation and reentry services lead to significant cost savings by reducing re-incarceration rates, lowering reliance on emergency services, and improving overall community well-being. Every dollar allocated to these programs results in long-term benefits, including increased workforce participation and healthier families.

We urge you to recognize the profound impact of these initiatives and to support the full funding of **Free Through Recovery** and **Community Connect**. By doing so, you are investing in the resilience and potential of North Dakotans who deserve the opportunity to build stable, productive lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate your commitment to policies that strengthen our communities and offer second chances to those who need them most. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or if we can provide further insights into the necessity of these programs.

Sincerely,



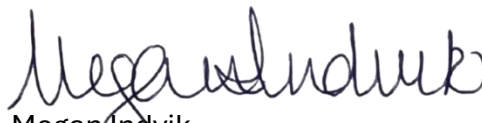
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