

**Good Morning, Chairman Dever, members of the Appropriations Committee, and esteemed guests.**

I am **Melinda Padilla Lynch**, the **Economic & Workforce Development Specialist** for the **North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission**. It is an honor to stand before you today and share more about my role and our work to support North Dakota's tribal nations. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with tribal communities and to contribute to initiatives that have such a meaningful impact.

In this role, I serve as a liaison between North Dakota's five tribal nations and various state, federal, and private agencies to identify, develop, and support economic and workforce development opportunities.

My work focuses on:

- Fostering partnerships,
- Researching and distributing grant opportunities,
- Enhancing access to industries, and
- Developing workforce programs tailored to each tribal nation's unique needs and strengths.

## **Key Responsibilities**

Some of my key responsibilities include:

- **Implementing and organizing the Native Developer Luncheons:** Quarterly events that provide technical training, facilitate important discussions on tribal needs, and share best practices in economic development.
- **Collaborating with the ND Department of Commerce's Workforce Division** to create essential soft skills training for employers, such as customer service training, to bolster workforce readiness.
- **Partnering with the ND Department of Commerce's Economic Development and Finance Division** to uncover opportunities for tribal economic growth and improve access to vital resources.
- **Building a relationship with the ND Council on the Arts** to empower Native artists to thrive as full-time entrepreneurs through cohort development and capacity-building initiatives.
- **Researching and sharing grant opportunities** to assist tribal nations in accessing crucial funding for their various initiatives.

## **Tribal Engagement**

Tribal Engagement is another core element of my work. This includes:

- Conducting regular visits to tribal nations to strengthen relationships and align with community goals.

- Participating in tribal economic and workforce development meetings to stay attuned to their priorities.
- Researching and implementing workforce programs informed by tribal asset reports and community-driven needs.

Last quarter, we commissioned a consulting firm to assess the economic assets and workforce needs of all five tribal nations. A key finding from this work was the universal desire among tribal members to pursue entrepreneurship.

Recognizing this need and working within our limited programming funds, we strategically partner with existing organizations to address these goals. For example, we are initiating discussions to create a **Native Entrepreneur Cohort** in collaboration with Native Economic Teams in Montana and Minnesota. This cohort will focus on business planning, capacity building, and advancing entrepreneurial ideas to the next stage of development.

To illustrate these initiatives, I have prepared graphics summarizing key findings from the consultant's reports. These visuals offer a 35,000-foot view of each tribal nation's unique strengths and challenges, highlighting the opportunities we are addressing and the partnerships we are cultivating.

### **Additional Responsibilities**

In addition to my primary responsibilities, our small team takes on many roles to maximize our impact.

#### **Event Planning and Management**

- Organizing the **Government-to-Government (G2G) Conference**.
- Coordinating the **Native American Hall of Honor**.
- Planning the **Native Legislative Training Day** to empower tribal members to navigate legislative processes effectively.

#### **Communication and Outreach**

- Designing promotional materials and sharing success stories through social media and newsletters to inspire and inform.  
*(I have brought an example for each of you to view.)*

#### **Law Enforcement and Policy Initiatives**

Working for the **City of Bowman** for six years, I had the privilege of working in law enforcement. Utilizing my background and connections, I attend and support initiatives focused on tribal safety, including:

- **Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP)**
- **Savanna's Act**

## **Legislative Support**

- Assisting community members with preparing testimony.
- Providing research to legislators.
- Sharing data to empower tribal advocacy efforts.

## **Closing**

I am deeply thankful for the chance to collaborate with such dedicated partners and to work on initiatives that help create stronger communities for the tribal members of North Dakota.

I am excited about the work ahead and the partnerships we are building to advance economic and workforce development.

**Thank you for your attention, and I stand for any questions.**