

**SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
SENATOR JUDY LEE, CHAIR
FEBRUARY 10, 2025**

**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1116**

Good morning, Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, my name is Joseph Charvat, and I serve as the Deputy Director of Facility Inspections for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR). House Bill 1116 was introduced by the DOCR to amend subsection 4 of section 11-19.1-11 of the North Dakota Century Code relating to the addition of inspection by the department of corrections as an agency that may receive a report of death, or an autopsy report from a coroner. This would also create a new subsection to 23-01-05.5 of the North Dakota Century Code which would allow the state forensic examiner to disclose a copy of an autopsy report to the department of corrections and rehabilitation when the deceased individual was an inmate in a county, regional or state correctional facility.

The bill is proposed to provide department timely access to autopsy reports when conducting inspections of county or regional correctional facilities within the scope of 12-44.1. This access will further allow the department of corrections to identify effective correctional strategies to respond to situations which resulted in a death of an individual within one of these facilities. Knowledge of cause of death is important to the correctional facility inspectors because it allows us to identify specific practices which can be amended to make facilities safer. Once we have this knowledge our team can work with an administrator or the facility to make adjustments to jail practices.

A general example may be an individual unexpectedly passes away in their cell. Upon receipt of the autopsy cause of death, inspectors find out the individual had overdosed on opioids. Inspectors can further educate staff on the warning signs of opioid usage and use of naloxone while also ensuring this life saving drug is accessible.

I ask that you support the proposed bill to provide the department of corrections and rehabilitation access to autopsy reports and I stand for any questions.