

Testimony Prepared for the
The North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 2115 Related to the Authorization for Children of Inmates to
Reside at the Heart River Correctional Center and Relating to Limitation of
Liability for Children Residing at the Heart River Correctional Center

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By: Chelsea Flory, Burleigh County Human Service Zone Director

Chair Larson, and members of the North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Cheslea Flory, and I am the Director for the Burleigh County Human Service Zone, which includes the county of Burleigh. In addition, I am a member of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. I am here today to provide testimony in support of Senate bill 2115 relating to the authorization for children of inmates to reside at the Heart River Correctional Center and relating to limitation of liability for children residing at the Heart River Correctional Center.

Human Service Zones are mandated to provide child welfare services, including child protection services, foster care, and in home case management as well as receiving CHINS (Child in Need of Services) referrals and administering economic assistance programs for the state of North Dakota. It is through these duties that we interact with inmates of DOCR facilities, as well as their children. Often, we are serving as legal custodian for children with incarcerated parents and as the legal custodian we understand the importance of keeping the family connection, as well as supporting the parents with successful re entry to their community. Zones have been collaborating with the Department of Corrections to pilot outreach efforts to include support with application for economic assistance programs, to ensure the inmates have an opportunity for continuum

of services to avoid any gaps in medical coverage, as well as securing additional economic assistance benefits, they may be eligible for.

SB 2115 would provide an opportunity for inmates to care for their children in a supportive environment, with the facility ensuring the safety of the children while supporting the family connection and enhancing parenting competencies from additional collaboration with stakeholders and services providers. Through conversation with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) and Heart River Correctional Center (HRCC), it is my understanding that this option for children of inmates to reside at HRCC applies to children birth to eighteen months old, and inmates are selected by an agency committee through an application process. This process would ensure selection of inmates who are in good mental and behavioral health, to allow for safe caregiving and positive engagement.

The North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association is in support of the fundamental aspects of this proposed bill, however, would look for ongoing collaboration between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), DOCR and HRCC regarding the development and review of policy and procedures relating to this matter. As the director of an agency that administers child protection services to include assessing reported allegations of abuse or neglect, it would be crucial that HRCC have clear policy, procedure and training related to reporting any incidents to ensure the safety of the children. Furthermore, as an agency that administers economic assistance programs, we would want to make sure that policies from DHHS align for inmates and their children to be eligible for services such as Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) while residing in the facility. Additionally, we would urge that

employed members of HRCC, and any inmates tasked with a caregiving role or responsibility, meet training requirements to include safe sleeping, pediatric CPR and mandated reporting of abuse and neglect. We would also want to ensure that any inmates of HRCC tasked with a caregiving role or responsibility complete necessary checks of registries relating to offenses against children. Additionally, there is no fiscal note associated with this proposed bill and as anyone knows, raising a child comes with additional expenses. There are additional costs for items such as clothing, diapers, wipes, formula, etc. that will need to be considered for fiscal impact, as well as any staffing or structural needs of this proposed program.

In conclusion, our association looks forward to opportunity for collaboration regarding policy and procedure development, review and implementation to ensure desired outcomes for all parties. Thank you for your consideration and I stand for questions from the committee.