



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

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Senator Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Committee,

For the record, my name is Kathy Frelich, and I have the honor of representing District 15, which includes Devils Lake, and the area to the North, up to the Canadian border.

HB 1197 started off as a request for grant funding for jails. It also provided for a committee to determine appropriate criteria, review proposals and award grants for the building or remodeling of jails. Yes, I realize it was a big ask but there is a great need. You may recall the Governor's address at the beginning of the Session which described the influx of population to our state. This influx means an increased need for infrastructure in our communities. This Assembly is looking at the need for increased housing, mental health services, workforce and childcare, but unfortunately, our communities also need jails.

This legislature is also looking at property tax relief for the citizens of North Dakota and there is likely to be some kind of cap on spending for political subdivisions. Our rural communities are already struggling to improve school infrastructure with property tax increases, but it is next to impossible to ask citizens to prioritize jails. And yet, jails are an essential need in our communities. Not only will new jails improve the safety in our communities, they will also improve the safety of those who work in these facilities. We must keep our jails safe for both our inmates and those working alongside them.

I couldn't let this hearing go without first explaining the need for the initial intention, however the Bill before you looks very different. There was no appetite for grant funding in the House committee, so the Bill before you is a study. I believe the study continues to be important given the great needs in our state.

This study was created to include all the pertinent parties; including representatives from small and large counties, local law enforcement, DOCR, OMB and the Attorney General's office. The study directs Legislative Management to look at the feasibility of county jails, regional correction centers, and the impacts of deferred admission.

I would encourage you to look through the testimony on-line. We are in a crisis. I urge you to give this study a favorable recommendation so we can look at the problem and find some solutions.

Thank you,