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Testimony

Senate Bill 2281 — Human Service

2/2/2021

Good morning Chairman Lee, and members of the committee. My name is Tara Lea Muhlhauser, Executive Director of CAWS North Dakota (ND) (Lobbyist # 1035). I am in favor of this bill.

CAWS ND is a coalition of programs in the state providing services for victims and survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking. I represent the 20 programs across the state of North Dakota.

CAWS North Dakota supports this bill and the benefits it has for participating agencies and victims of sexual assault. A sexual assault kit tracking system will streamline evidence collection processes and minimize or prevent a backlog from occurring. By having specific location information for each coded kit, means that kits are less likely to get lost or experience a delay in submission. The ability for victims to anonymously track their kit will greatly improve transparency and the ease of participation, likely increasing cooperation in the criminal justice process, if desired by the victim.

Sexual assault kit tracking empowers victims to access their kit status, keeping them informed throughout the process. It's important for victims to know that their kit has not been left untested or overlooked. The systems in place can be daunting and difficult to navigate for individuals who are not familiar with this process. A secure online portal will allow victims a current and more accessible platform for updates. Connections to robust wrap-around services for victims will be easier to provide with a tracking system in place.

Thank you for this opportunity and if you have any questions, please let me know.