



# West Fargo Police Department

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**Denis E. Otterness**  
Chief of Police

## **House Bill 1383**

Good morning members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Denis Otterness and I am the Chief of Police for the City of West Fargo. I have been a sworn law enforcement officer for the past 30 years and have served in my current role since September of last year.

I am appearing before you and offering my testimony today in opposition to House Bill 1383. If passed, this bill will significantly impact the positive working relationships we currently have with our Federal law enforcement partners and negatively impact public safety in our communities. Over the course of my career I have seen the many benefits to establishing strong partnerships across local, county, state and federal agencies.

By way of background, I think it's important you know that prior to coming to West Fargo I spent a majority of my 30 year law enforcement career working for the City of Bloomington, a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota. During this time I worked 10 ½ years in my department's Special Investigation Unit, in an undercover capacity, primarily investigating drug and human trafficking cases. For nearly eight of those years I was assigned to the Drug Enforcement Administration as a Task Force Officer investigating, disrupting and dismantling large scale drug trafficking organizations. Following my assignment at the Drug Enforcement Administration I spent nearly six years testifying as an expert witness in United States District Court, in the District of Minnesota, in Federal drug and firearms trafficking trials.

The West Fargo Police Department participates on several task forces in the Fargo-Moorhead metro area. I have detectives assigned to the Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force, the United States Marshal's Service High Plains Fugitive Task Force and recently had a detective assigned part time on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Task Force. We also have detectives assigned to a Metro Area Street Crimes Unit and N.D. Bureau of Criminal Investigation Narcotics Task Force. Participation and collaboration in these task forces allows for greater information sharing, in addition to pooling and sharing of resources (financial and personnel).

Restricting North Dakota law enforcement from partnering with our federal counterparts will have a significant impact on public safety. Based on my experience our federal partners bring a multitude of resources not always available on a local level. Prohibiting working relationships, especially as it relates to firearms violations, will bring unintended consequences. Our federal law enforcement partners give



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us the ability to infiltrate interstate criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking, illegal firearms trafficking, human trafficking, organized retail crime and other criminal activity. Because all of these acts are criminal in nature, and typically involve transfers of large quantities of United States Currency, they nearly always have a firearms nexus. It has been my experience that federal investigation and prosecution has been highly effective when dealing with interstate criminal organizations and career criminals that victimize citizens in our communities.

I would like to provide you with two recent examples of why it is important to defeat this legislation. Over the course of the last two weeks the West Fargo Police Department has responded to two shootings. While I can't provide specific details surrounding these active and on-going investigations I can tell you that both shootings involved unintended juvenile victims being struck by gunfire. These shootings involved suspects well-known to law enforcement and were targeted events. During both of these incidents my department has received significant support from our federal law enforcement partners. Because there is a firearms nexus in both cases the ATF has provided investigative personnel and resources. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has provided analytical support and the United States Marshal's Service assisted in apprehending two subjects who were wanted in connection to these shootings and had fled our local jurisdiction. These cases highlight why it's important that North Dakota law enforcement be able to continue working with our federal counterparts to provide the highest level of public safety to the residents of our communities.

I want to thank you again for the opportunity to be here today and will stand for any questions you might have.

Denis Otterness  
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