

Testimony prepared for:
House Political Subdivisions
Donnell Preskey, NDACo
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Re: HB 1197 – Jail Facilities Improvement Grant Fund

Chair Longmuir and committee members, I'm Donnell Preskey with the ND Association of Counties, one of my roles at NDACo is serving as the Executive Director of the ND Sheriff's & Deputies Association. Both NDACo and NDSA are supportive of HB 1197 and brought this bill concept forward.

We are in a crisis situation when it comes to jail space in North Dakota. This is being seen at the state prison level and at the local level and to compound the situation, the lack of space in the state prison system is causing extra pressure on our local facilities. The prison system has been over capacity since July 2023. On any given week there are between 200 – 250 state sentenced inmates in county facilities.

HB 1197 provides a possible solution. There are five county or regional jail facilities looking at expanding or building new jail facilities in our state. They are: Lake Region Correctional Center in Ramsey County, Walsh County, Grand Forks County, Cass County, and Richland County.

This bill establishes a jail facilities improvement committee. This is modeled after the court facilities improvement committee. The committee will designate grants up to \$10 million for jail facilities improvements, remodeling or replacement. To qualify, counties will need local funding of at least 25% of the cost. The \$50 million will come from the Strategic Investment & Improvement fund, a perfect use of the SIIF fund.

As you can imagine, the cost to expand or build a jail is significant and property taxes is the only source for most counties to rely on to fund a jail. This bill would help reduce some of the local taxpayer burden. The other funding option some counties have utilized is a sales tax increase – which only works in counties that have an economy that makes sales tax a viable revenue option.

Looking at the five county / regional facility plans – the cost estimate for all five is a little more than \$250 million and will allow for 434 new jail beds in the state.

The last round of major jail expansions occurred in 2015-17. Eight jails in the western and central part of the state completed expansions or new builds adding 800 beds. The jail capacity statewide is currently 2,588.

Mr. Chairman and committee we ask for your support of HB 1197.