

Testimony prepared for:
Senate Appropriations
Donnell Preskey, NDACo
February 17, 2025



Re: HB 1213: Jail Improvement Loan

Chair Bekkedahl 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 1213 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 1213 provides some assistance to our counties looking at making jail improvements. There are 19 local jail facilities in the state and five are currently looking at expanding or building new jail facilities. They are: Lake Region Correctional Center in Ramsey County, Walsh County, Grand Forks County, Cass County, and Richland County.

Because of the great need we are asking the Senate to consider returning the bill to its original form. As introduced, the bill established a new jail improvement revolving loan fund to provide a loan through Bank of ND at no more than 2% for counties to use in renovation, expansion or replacing correctional facilities. The ask was for \$200 million into the loan fund. The House changes reduced this to \$50 million and had the funding added to the infrastructure revolving loan fund.

As you can imagine, the cost to expand or build a jail is significant and property taxes are the primary 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 add an additional 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 1213.