



North Dakota House of Representatives

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Testimony of Representative Lisa Finley-DeVille on HB 1581

March 20, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veteran Affairs committee. My name is Representative Lisa Finley-DeVille, I represent District 4A that includes Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation. Thank you for the opportunity to present this bill before you today. As a sponsor of HB 1581, which provides an appropriation to the department of commerce for tribal tourism grants.

Tourism is a vital tool for fostering economic development and cultural preservation on tribal lands. By promoting and investing in tribal tourism, North Dakota can support job creation, diversify local economies, and provide a platform for sharing the cultural heritage of Indigenous communities. According to the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association¹ (AIANTA), tribal tourism contributes significantly to regional and state economies, with non-Native visitors frequently seeking authentic experiences, cultural education, and outdoor recreation². Tribal tourism not only strengthens economic self-sufficiency for tribal nations but also builds cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

Investing in tribal tourism infrastructure and marketing through targeted grants will ensure that North Dakota's tribal nations are positioned to capitalize on growing interest in cultural tourism. The U.S. Department of Commerce reports that cultural and heritage tourism accounts for over \$171 billion annually³ in the U.S. economy, with Native American sites and experiences playing an increasingly popular role. States that have supported tribal tourism initiatives have seen measurable returns²⁻²¹ in visitor spending and local business development.

This bill will provide \$500,000 in grants for tribal governments in North Dakota to enhance and promote tourism opportunities, helping to expand local economies and boost job creation. Tribal governments may apply for grants of up to \$100,000 to develop tourism initiatives such as cultural heritage centers, interpretive trails, community events, and marketing campaigns that highlight their unique histories and landscapes.

The proposed tribal tourism grants represent a strategic investment in the future of North Dakota's economy and its relationship with tribal nations, promoting sustainable growth, cultural preservation, and mutual prosperity.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I ask that the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs committee gives HB 1581 a do pass recommendation.

¹ <https://www.aianta.org/economic-impact-study-reveals-native-tourism-is-a-14-billion-industry/>

² <https://nasaa-arts.org/newsletter/2010-nasaa-notes-issues/january-2010-nasaa-notes/cultural-heritage-travel-contributes-192-billion-annually-u-s-economy/>

³ https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2014/by_program/reports_and_data/toolkits/cultural_districts/issue_briefs/Cultural-Tourism-Attracting-Visitors-and-Their-Spending.pdf