

Chairperson Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Nathan Mickelson, the Prison Reentry Manager at Ministry on the Margins (MOTM), a nonprofit ministry in Bismarck - Mandan started by Sister Kathleen Atkinson almost 10 years ago. Before I begin my testimony, I want to reiterate a few pertinent pieces of HB 1231. Specifically, this law encompasses *only* low risk sexual offenders, not moderate or high, who have successfully completed a set of rigorous criteria. Furthermore, as firm believers in public safety, HB 1231 bill states specifically states that the judge's discretion during the decision-making process would consider the entire history of the offender with a focus on public safety.

Working with sex offenders daily, I have seen firsthand the extreme difficulties and barriers they encounter from social stigmatization and family disownment to quick loss of employment and the insurmountable task of finding housing. As a reentry manager, a key component of our focus is not only human dignity but also rehabilitation, compliance and collaboration with various state agencies such as DOCR, parole and probation, job service and many others. These collaborative efforts create a path for advancement in opportunities and social support, both keys in successful reentry to fight recidivism and **our growing prison population**. Those on the registry, in addition to their conviction, are already behind the eight ball with the added task of following, understanding and complying with a convoluted, and nearly unnavigable registry filled with legalese.

I am going to share a real story with all of you today. JT was convicted of a sexual offense back in 2011 and released in 2014. Upon release, he is ostracized by his family, loses some of his friends, living in a halfway house, unemployed and deemed a **low-risk sex** offender. Eventually, JT manages to land a job, completes his court mandated treatment, attends support meetings, finds housing, even settles down with a significant other. However, he quickly loses his new job and housing not because of his conviction, but because he is on the registry. JT cannot accompany his kids to school or be on school property, be a part of carpool, and is shunned by local parents and neighbors. His significant other is excluded from social activities, programs and loses some of her friends. Despite this, JT pushes on, is steadfast, completes his federal supervision early, is fully employed, housed with his family, and compliant with the registry for 10 years. He is low risk. To celebrate his early release, JT and his significant other book a cruise with 12 other friends which they have planned for almost a year. A week before he is scheduled to embark, he is notified by the cruise line he cannot go on the cruise. He is a sex offender. He even gets a passport which is specially marked in a way every country he tries to visit, notifies them that he is a sex offender.



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My point is, despite completing all of which *is lawfully required of him/her*, the small victories, personal, professional advancement, and being successfully rehabilitated, JT continues to face an uphill battle, the stigma of being on the sex offender registry.

I support HB 1231 which would allow people like JT, a rehabilitated, compliant sex offender to slowly regain a piece of their humanity back, continuing rebuilding, heal the social scars and open future opportunities

Thank you, Chairperson Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, for allowing me the opportunity to speak before you.

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