



North Dakota Native Vote
919 S 7th Street
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January 27, 2025

Testimony of Nicole Donaghy, Executive Director of North Dakota Native vote
in Support of Senate Bill 2220

Chairwoman Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

North Dakota Native Vote supports the passage of Senate Bill 2220 to establish operational guidelines and mandatory training for law enforcement officers and state's attorneys addressing human trafficking, prostitution, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. This legislation constitutes a significant measure in protecting vulnerable individuals and ensuring that our criminal justice system addresses these severe crimes with both efficiency and empathy.

Human trafficking, prostitution, and the exploitation of children for commercial purposes are profoundly damaging offenses that impact victims, their families, communities, and society as a whole. These crimes, while widespread and severe, disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples, particularly women and children, who are especially vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

North Dakota has seen an increase in human trafficking, correlated with the rapid growth in certain industries, particularly due to the oil boom in the Bakken region. Studies and reports have shown alarming trends regarding the trafficking of people for sexual exploitation, and the rise of missing and murdered Indigenous women and children is especially concerning. According to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), Indigenous women are 2.5 times more likely to experience violent crime than their white counterparts, and they make up a disproportionate number of trafficking victims in North Dakota. [Source: National Crime Information Center, "Missing Persons and Unidentified Persons Statistics," 2020.]

This stark statistic highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and specialized training for law enforcement, so officers can effectively identify, respond to, and investigate these crimes. The truth is that many of these victims are lured into situations where they become vulnerable to trafficking, and the existing gaps in training and resources have allowed this cycle to continue unchecked for far too long.

In 2019, the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force released findings indicating an alarming rise in the commercial sexual exploitation of children, with many of the victims being Indigenous minors. This report revealed that traffickers often target communities with limited resources, such as Indigenous reservations, and that the complex nature of human trafficking in North Dakota requires specialized knowledge to combat effectively. [Source: North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force, "Report and Recommendations," 2019.]

The operational guidelines outlined in this bill will ensure that law enforcement agencies across the state develop specific, uniform protocols for handling crimes related to human trafficking, prostitution, and the commercial exploitation of children. These guidelines, which include clear procedures for investigation, victim assistance, and collaboration with community resources, are essential to combatting trafficking on a state level.



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The training program, designed to be trauma-informed and victim-centered, will better equip law enforcement officers and state's attorneys to handle survivors and complex crimes. New recruits will undergo mandatory ten-hour training, with veteran officers receiving five hours of ongoing education. This ensures continued awareness, sensitivity, and expertise in handling trafficking and exploitation.

The inclusion of a victim-centered approach in the training will help ensure that survivors of trafficking, particularly Indigenous women and children, are treated with dignity and connected to the services they need to rebuild their lives. By addressing the systemic issues of underreporting, inadequate victim support, and jurisdictional challenges, we can make a significant difference in the lives of those affected.

The issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and children, as well as the rise in trafficking cases across the state, demands swift action. Indigenous communities have long faced disproportionate levels of violence and exploitation, and North Dakota must prioritize justice for these victims. The resources, training, and operational guidelines outlined in this bill are necessary steps toward addressing the crisis and providing law enforcement with the tools they need to better protect all residents of North Dakota.

I urge this committee to take immediate action in supporting this bill, not only to combat the rise of human trafficking but also to give a voice to those who have been silenced by exploitation.

I ask that you give a do pass recommendation to support the passage of Senate Bill 2220. Thank you for your time and consideration.