

Testimony Prepared for the
The North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 2352 Related to the Authorization for Children of Inmates to
Reside at the Heart River Correctional Center and Relating to Limitation of
Liability for Children Residing at the Heart River Correctional Center

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By: Chelsea Flory, Burleigh County Human Service Zone Director

Chair Larson, and members of the North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Cheslea Flory, and I am the Director for the Burleigh County Human Service Zone, which includes the county of Burleigh. In addition, I am a member of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. I am here today to provide testimony in support of Senate bill 2352 relating to the authorization for children of inmates to reside at the Heart River Correctional Center and relating to limitation of liability for children residing at the Heart River Correctional Center.

Human Service Zones are mandated to provide child welfare services, including child protection services, foster care and in home case management, as well as receiving Child in Need of Services (CHINS) referrals. It is through these duties that we interact with residents of Department of Correction and Rehabilitation (DOCR) facilities, as well as their children. Often, we serve as the legal custodian for children with incarcerated parents and as the custodian we work with the family towards the goal of reunification. These active efforts could include conducting family visits both virtually and within the correctional facilities, engagement regarding consent for medical needs or service planning and providing parents with parenting education based on the needs of the child and family.

Additionally, Human Service Zones are responsible for administering economic assistance programs for the state of North Dakota. Zones have been collaborating with DOCR to facilitate outreach efforts to include support with application for economic assistance programs, to ensure the residents have an opportunity for continuum of services to avoid any gaps in medical coverage, as well as securing additional economic assistance benefits, they may be eligible for.

SB 2352 allows for an opportunity where residents can care for their children in a safe and supportive environment. This practice would support the family bond and connection while providing active parenting opportunities where skills can be assessed, and education can be provided that could support the overall goal of building safe and healthy families. Through conversation with DOCR and Heart River Correctional Center (HRCC), it is my understanding that this option for children to reside at HRCC applies to children birth to eighteen months old, and residents wishing to participate in this are selected by an agency committee through an application process.

The North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association is in support of the fundamental aspects of this proposed bill and would look for ongoing collaboration between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), DOCR and HRCC regarding the development and review of policy and procedures relating to this. It would be crucial that HRCC have clear policy, procedure and training related to the safety of the children. This could include necessary checks of registries relating to offenses against children, as well as specific training such as safe sleep, pediatric CPR and mandated reporting of abuse and neglect to name a few.

In conclusion, our association looks forward to opportunity for collaboration regarding policy and procedure development, review and implementation to ensure desired outcomes for all parties. Thank you for your consideration.