



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:
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Good Morning Chair Roers, Vice Chair Castaneda, and Members of the Committee;

For the record, my name is Jayme Davis, and I am a Representative from District 9, which includes two Tribal Nations—the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, where I am an enrolled member, and the Spirit Lake Nation. District 9 also includes the beautiful Peace Gardens.

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce House Bill 1535, legislation that establishes the Feather Alert Notice System in North Dakota. This bill has received strong support from law enforcement agencies, including the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and the North Dakota Highway Patrol, as well as each of the five tribal nations within our state.

HB 1535 is a proactive measure to address the crisis of missing Indigenous persons by creating an emergency alert system that will function similarly to Amber and Silver Alerts. This system will ensure that when an Indigenous person is reported missing under critical circumstances, a coordinated, statewide notification can be activated to aid in their safe recovery.

Right now, there are currently 16 missing Indigenous people in North Dakota. As of this morning, four of those are from right here in the Bismarck/Mandan area, and a total of eight Indigenous individuals have gone missing since January 1, 2025. The Feather Alert will be another tool in our toolbox to combat the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) epidemic. However, this is not an alert that will be activated every time someone goes missing. The process will start at the local or tribal level, and only if the established criteria for a Feather Alert are met will the system be activated at the state level.

Tribal nations are also working to implement their own measures to address MMIP cases. Additionally, this bill aligns with HB 1199, which proposes the creation of an MMIP task force to improve communication among all agencies working on this crisis and to identify and fill the gaps that contribute to the disproportionately high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous people compared to the national average.

Some of the key provisions in HB 1535 include:

1. Establishing the Feather Alert System
 - The BCI, in partnership with the ND Highway Patrol and State Radio, will oversee the alert system, ensuring a rapid response to reports of missing Indigenous persons.
 - The alert will be broadcast using the Emergency Alert System (EAS), similar to Amber and Silver Alerts, to notify the public and law enforcement statewide.
2. Tribal and State Collaboration
 - The Indian Affairs Commission will serve as the primary liaison between state and tribal governments.

- The bill mandates annual public meetings with tribal representatives and law enforcement to assess and improve the effectiveness of the Feather Alert system.

3. Funding and Implementation

- HB 1535 originally included an appropriation of \$250,000 to support the implementation, coordination, and evaluation of the system.
- This was removed in the House and I respectfully ask for the committee to reinstate the funding at the level requested below. I have attached to my testimony the funding it would require for one FTE under the Bureau of Criminal Investigation for the biennium which is different from the original request.
- This funding will allow for training and a full-time coordinator.

Support and Potential Amendments

- I have worked closely with BCI and the ND Highway Patrol and the Indian Affairs Commission. We continue to discuss possible amendments to strengthen this bill. My focus remains specifically with passing with the Feather Alert notice and its implementation.
- Importantly, all five tribal nations in North Dakota support this legislation, recognizing it as a critical step toward saving lives and protecting Indigenous communities.

Now more than ever - there is no question in my mind that this specific alert is needed to save lives. Unfortunately - in real time - we are actively searching for a missing Indigenous man by the name of Renzo Bullhead here in the Bismarck/Mandan area. His family will be the next to speak.

Chair Roers, Vice Chair Castaneda, members of the committee. I've experienced firsthand what it takes to look for our people that go missing from our reservation and now when they go missing outside our reservation. Both are incredibly daunting tasks, and I don't wish anyone to have to go through those experiences. I wish I didn't have to stand in front of you today asking for you to pass this bill. I wish this bill didn't have to exist. I hope and pray that some day I can come back and say we no longer need this in our century code because our people are no longer being targeted. I no longer have to be hyper aware of my surroundings. I no longer have to be vigilant about when my nieces, nephews, sisters, brothers, cousins go off somewhere on their own - that they all now make it home safe every night. Indigenous people are no longer 40% of those being sex trafficked. For Indigenous women murder is no longer the 3rd leading cause of our deaths. We no longer go missing at a 10x higher rate than other ethnicities. So, believe me when I say, I don't want to be standing before you asking for this legislation but I have to. It's a must.

Madame Chair and members of the committee, HB 1535 is about ensuring that when an Indigenous person goes missing, every available resource is mobilized to bring them home safely. This is not just a tribal issue—it is a North Dakota issue, and it is our responsibility to act.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 1535 and look forward to working with the committee on any necessary amendments to make this bill as effective as possible.

Thank you, Madame Chairman. I am happy to answer any questions.

AMENDMENT

7. The Bureau of Criminal Investigation shall establish a full-time equivalent (FTE) sworn position for a statewide missing persons coordinator. The costs associated with this position shall include:
 - a. Salary and benefits: \$250,210 per biennium;
 - b. Ongoing operating costs: \$53,235 per biennium;
 - c. One-time operating and small equipment costs: \$19,785;
 - d. One-time capital asset costs (vehicle, radios, and necessary equipment): \$64,100.