

**2025 HOUSE JUDICIARY**

**HB 1361**

# 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Judiciary Committee**  
Room JW327B, State Capitol

HB 1361  
1/20/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 12.1-41 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to mandatory minimum sentences for human trafficking offenders; and to provide a penalty.

9:41 a.m. Chairman Klemin opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Klemin, Vice-Chairman Karls, Vice-Chairman Vetter, Representatives Christianson, Hoverson, Johnston, McLeod, S. Olson, Satrom, Tveit, VanWinkle, Wolff, Schneider

Members Absent: Representative Henderson

## **Discussion Topics:**

- Obstructions to investigations
- Number of North Dakota trafficking victims
- Tough-on-crime effectiveness
- Labor trafficking vs sex trafficking

9:42 a.m. Representative Daniel Johnston, North Dakota Representative for District 24, introduced the bill.

9:50 a.m. Jacob Thomsen, Policy Analyst with North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action, testified in favor and provided testimony #30085.

9:56 a.m. Tod Fossetta, Ambassador for Shared Hope International, testified in favor and provided testimony #30016.

10:03 a.m. Tyler Merkel, 31:8 Project, testified in favor and provided testimony #30241.

10:05 a.m. Piper Bjornsen, Independent, testified in favor.

## **Additional written testimony:**

Nicolas Cullen, Bismarck, North Dakota, submitted testimony in favor #29902

Stephanie Jorritsma, Bismarck, North Dakota, submitted testimony in favor #30094.

Justin Hillman, Dakotas advocate at the National Association of Rational Sexual Offense Laws, submitted testimony in opposition #29958

10:12 a.m. Chairman Klemin closed the hearing.

*Wyatt Armstrong, Committee Clerk*

HB 1361  
In Support Of

House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to you in support of HB 1361. Human Trafficking is one of the most heinous crimes that can be done to another human and must be penalized as such. Therefore, I request a DO PASS. Thank you for your consideration.

Nicolas Cullen



## **RE: Opposition to HB1361**

Dear North Dakota House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the National Association of Rational Sexual Offense Laws (NARSOL) North Dakota Advocates regarding House Bill No. 1361, which proposes mandatory minimum sentences for human trafficking offenses. While we strongly support efforts to combat human trafficking, we have concerns about the implementation of mandatory minimum sentences.

### **Support for Anti-Trafficking Efforts**

We commend the intent behind this bill to address the serious issue of human trafficking. It's crucial that we take strong action against those who exploit vulnerable individuals.

### **Opposition to Mandatory Minimums**

However, we respectfully oppose the mandatory minimum sentencing requirements outlined in this bill for the following reasons:

- **Reduced Judicial Discretion:** Mandatory minimums limit a judge's ability to consider individual case circumstances, potentially leading to unjust sentences.
- **Disproportionate Impact:** These sentences may disproportionately affect certain communities and fail to account for mitigating factors.
- **Ineffectiveness in Deterrence:** Research suggests that mandatory minimums do not significantly deter crime more than other sentencing approaches.
- **Increased Incarceration Costs:** Long mandatory sentences can lead to higher prison populations and increased costs to taxpayers.
- **Potential for Coerced Pleas:** The threat of lengthy mandatory sentences may pressure innocent defendants to plead guilty to lesser charges.

### **Alternative Approaches**

Instead of mandatory minimums, we suggest considering:

- Increased funding for victim support services
- Enhanced training for law enforcement to identify and assist trafficking victims
- Rehabilitation programs for offenders
- Addressing root causes of human trafficking through social and economic initiatives

We urge you to reconsider the mandatory minimum sentencing provisions in this bill while maintaining a strong stance against human trafficking. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Justin L. Hillman  
NARSOL Dakota's Advocates  
jhillman@narsol.org

Cc: Brenda V. Jones, Executive Director (bjones@narsol.org)

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1-19-25

Tod Fossetta  
Archangel Ministries  
620 Railroad Ave.  
Homestead, MT 59242

Dear Senators and Representatives:

My name is Tod Fossetta and I am presenting myself to this committee to share testimony regarding HB1361.

I have over 30 years experience working with domestic violence and sex trafficking victims, organizations, shelters and other support services. I am an Ambassador for Shared Hope International, a sex trafficking prevention organization with over 1000 trained ambassadors, and one of the nation's leading policy and political action teams. I have worked with organizations including the Pierce County Coalition for Domestic Violence and the Women's Crisis Shelter in Williston, ND. I have training through Shared Hope, Operation Underground Railroad and the Association for the Recovery of Children. I am a US Army Veteran, and since the murder of my sister in an act of domestic violence in 1984, I believe the Lord has called me to this vocation. I am the Founder of Archangel Ministries, through which I work with victims, organizations and church groups. One of my primary goals is to educate men on the dangers of pornography, buying sex and the effect it has on them, the community, and the women exploited for those uses.

I feel this bill is very important and strict sentencing guidelines will help keep predators and pimps off the street, as well as provide a deterrent to those contemplating it. Also, taking the issue of sentencing off the table will ensure that judicial personnel with less experience, training and knowledge in sex trafficking will have to follow these guidelines.

I would like to offer my experience and knowledge to answer any questions the committee may have. I do not have a specific testimony laid out, except to give

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an overview on the damage caused by sex trafficking, how victims are treated, the nature of the perpetrators, and the need to address it in an aggressive manner.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Tod Fossetta



### Testimony Supporting House Bill 1361

Jacob Thomsen, Policy Analyst  
North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action  
January 20, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Klemin and honorable members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Jacob Thomsen, and I am a Policy Analyst with North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action. I am testifying on behalf of our organization in support of House Bill 1361 and respectfully request that you render a “DO PASS” on this bill.

Our organization believes that every person has inherent worth, and dignity given from God. Human trafficking, in its various forms, steals that worth and dignity away from the people who are victims of it. A person becomes dehumanized and is turned into a product, rather than a soul with worth, capability, and potential. They deserve to be loved. That feeling of love gets ripped away when people are bought and sold like a commodity.

This bill targets traffickers in our state and sends the message that the citizens of North Dakota are committed to making sure that those who commit abhorrent crimes such as this face significant penalties. This bill sends the message that North Dakota will not tolerate exploitation and slavery.

According to statistics from the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force, from 2016 to 2022, there were 700 victims of human trafficking that were served by the task force<sup>1</sup>. That averages out to about 117 victims per year. These victims deserve justice, and this bill delivers it firmly.

This bill is also timely. In talking with The Lifeguard Group, an organization out of Montana that also does work in Western North Dakota, we were told that the Bakken oil boom found sex traffickers leaving Las Vegas to come to North Dakota because business was better here. With President Trump taking office, there is a great chance that the oil business in our state will expand once again, and the sex trafficking industry won’t be too far behind it.

We believe that we are in the perfect time and place as a state to pass this bill into law and let the sex trafficking industry know that they are not welcome here and that they will be met with heavy penalties if it happens.

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<sup>1</sup> Schwartz, E. (2023, January 25). *Testimony to the North Dakota State Assembly: Senate Appropriations Committee, Government*. North Dakota Legislative Assembly. [https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/68-2023/testimony/SAPPGOV-2003-20230125-16496-F-SCHWARTZ\\_EMILY.pdf](https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/68-2023/testimony/SAPPGOV-2003-20230125-16496-F-SCHWARTZ_EMILY.pdf)

North Dakota needs to be a state that is tough on human traffickers for the sake of its most vulnerable citizens. We cannot be a state that lets human trafficking go unnoticed. For these reasons, North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action requests that you vote "DO PASS" on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will stand for any questions.



January 20, 2025

**Testimony in Support of HB 1361**

Chairman Lawrence Klemin  
Judiciary Committee  
North Dakota House of Representatives  
600 East Boulevard Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58505

Chairman Klemin and Members of the House Judiciary Committee, my name is Stephanie Jorritsma, and I am testifying as a citizen of North Dakota.

I was blessed to grow up in a loving and safe home with parents who would have done anything to protect me. Unfortunately, there are children around our state who grow up in places that are not safe, where traffickers can enter their lives. Sometimes, those traffickers are their own parents.

I have never been afraid to go home—but I have seen a friend spend hours at home not knowing when their parent will come back, only to be screamed at upon their return. I have never been abused—but I know of a girl, abused for years by her father—a father who will get out of prison before her little brother turns 18. I have not been trafficked—but I am here to speak for those who have been. It takes time and safety to heal from trafficking, and we owe it to those who have been trafficked to give them time to heal. I cannot fix their pain or restore what has been hurt, but I am testifying so that it does not happen again.

In this light, I ask that you support a **DO PASS** on House Bill 1361.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Jorritsma  
*stephaniejorritsma@hotmail.com*



**Tyler Merkel, 31:8 Project**  
**marketing@318project.org**  
**701.557.3750**

**Piper Bjornsen, Lived-Experience Expert, 31:8 Project**  
**piper\_bjornsen@icloud.com**  
**701.955.3464**

***In support of House Bill 1361***

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this introduction. My name is Tyler Merkel, and I represent 31:8 Project, a Bismarck-based nonprofit dedicated to equipping and challenging society to proactively address human trafficking through education, advocacy, and awareness. Our work is accomplished through program areas including education and human trafficking survivor mentorship. In 2024, we were privileged to provide services to over 60 survivors of human trafficking, 85% of whom were trafficked within North Dakota. Additionally, we delivered nearly 170 presentations statewide to a diverse range of audiences, including law enforcement, schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations. This year, we will host our *5th Annual Bakken Human Trafficking Summit* in Bismarck, with the goal of educating over 400 professionals and community members. Today, it is my honor to introduce Piper Bjornsen, a lived experience expert of human trafficking that has been part of 31:8 Project's *Survivor Mentorship Program*. Her courage to testify on her own behalf is a powerful reminder of why we must address this issue with urgency and compassion. Piper brings firsthand insight into the realities of human trafficking, and both of us will be available for questions regarding our support of House Bill 1361.

Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Piper Bjornsen. When I think about my journey and hear other survivor stories, what they went through and how we all got here, I compare it to The Oregon Trail. You all remember that game? It was a historical thing! It sometimes feels like each of us had a wagon with a crew and trekked across the United States. Lots of ups and downs, broken wagon wheels....and some of us didn't make it.

From a young age, I was told to be seen and not heard. I did not have any strong female role models. My mother was searching for a man that would take care of "everything" and a

revolving door of men led to physical and sexual abuse at a young age. Looking back on it, I see how it negatively affected my outlook on relationships and what a loving partner is. It showed a pattern in my life with every relationship I was in.

We are all searching for love and acceptance. We want someone who "gets us". It's human nature. Unfortunately, when you're dealing with past sexual trauma and you don't understand PTSD, often you use drugs to self-medicate. For as long as I could, I ran as fast and hard right into the arms of my trafficker, which occurred in Williston, North Dakota.

Often when I tell people my story or hear others' opinions on human trafficking, people ask the question "why didn't you leave", and it's difficult to answer. When I got into the "life", which is another phrase for human trafficking, I did not realize what was happening. Traffickers feed off your insecurities. They know what you need to establish trust and say all the right things. I felt like he was giving me so much and I wanted to appeal to him. It was an extreme situation and a very dangerous lifestyle. But I survived.

Years later, while I was serving a prison sentence here in North Dakota due to my trafficking situation, I got a visit from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and Homeland Security. They had some questions for me about my ex-boyfriend, the trafficker. We met over the course of my prison sentence and put the pieces together. It took time for me to realize the situation I had been in. I was part of a 5-year investigation and just one of many women who fell victim to my trafficker. When I got out of prison, I testified against him in a federal courtroom. It is believed that he trafficked close to 30 people in North Dakota and around the nation. He got a 20-year sentence.

For each human trafficking case, justice looks different. In fact, many survivors have not seen successful prosecutions take place in these situations. Hopefully with bills like House Bill 1361, it will allow the conversation to continue why greater sentences need to happen when it comes to this crime. My testimony is just one example of the many different cases out there. Through my work with 31:8 Project, one of my goals has been to increase minimum sentences regarding human trafficking cases. I am truly honored to be here today to share part of my story with you. Thank you all for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

# 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Judiciary Committee**  
Room JW327B, State Capitol

HB 1361  
1/27/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 12.1-41 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to mandatory minimum sentences for human trafficking offenders; and to provide a penalty.

3:33 p.m. Chairman Klemin opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Klemin, Vice-Chairman Vetter, Representatives Christianson, Hoverson, Johnston, McLeod, S. Olson, Satrom, VanWinkle, Wolff, Schneider

Members Absent: Vice-Chairman Karls, Representatives Henderson, Tveit

## **Discussion Topics:**

- Definition and penalties of forced labor
- Definition and penalties of sexual servitude

3:44 p.m. Representative McLeod moved a Do Pass

3:44 p.m. Representative Wolff seconded the motion.

<b>Representatives</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Representative Lawrence R. Klemin	N
Representative Karen Karls	A
Representative Steve Vetter	N
Representative Nels Christianson	N
Representative Donna Henderson	A
Representative Jeff Hoverson	Y
Representative Daniel Johnston	Y
Representative Carrie McLeod	Y
Representative SuAnn Olson	Y
Representative Bernie Satrom	N
Representative Mary Schneider	N
Representative Bill Tveit	A
Representative Lori VanWinkle	Y
Representative Christina Wolff	Y

3:59 p.m. Motion passed 6-5-3

3:59 p.m. Representative Hoverson will carry the bill.

4:00 p.m. Chairman Klemin closed the hearing.

*Wyatt Armstrong, Committee Clerk*

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE**  
**HB 1361 ([25.0961.01000](#))**

**Judiciary Committee (Rep. Klemin, Chairman)** recommends **DO PASS** (6 YEAS, 5 NAYS, 3 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). HB 1361 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.

**2025 SENATE JUDICIARY**

**HB 1361**

# 2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

## Judiciary Committee Peace Garden Room, State Capitol

HB 1361  
3/18/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 12.1-41 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to mandatory minimum sentences for human trafficking offenders; and to provide a penalty.

2:30 p.m. Chair Larson opened the hearing.

Members present:

Chair Larson, Vice Chairman Paulson, Senators: Castaneda, Cory, Luick, Myrdal, Braunberger.

### Discussion Topics:

- Human trafficking statistics
- Victim support services
- Judicial discretion in sentencing
- Rehabilitation of offenders

2:30 p.m. Representative Johnston introduced the bill.

2:40 p.m. Jacob Thomsen, Policy Analyst, ND Family Alliance Legislative Action, testified in favor and submitted testimony #42844.

2:43 p.m. Stacy Schaffer, 31:8 Project, testified in favor and submitted testimony #42875.

2:44 p.m. Piper Bjornsen testified in favor.

2:51 p.m. Tod Fossetta, Archangel Ministries, testified in favor and submitted testimony #41975.

2:53 p.m. David Tamisiea, Executive Director, ND Catholic Conference, testified as neutral and submitted testimony #42717.

### Additional written testimony:

Rory D. Somsen, State Secretary, North Dakota Young Republicans, submitted testimony in favor #42638.

3:12 p.m. Chair Larson closed the hearing.

*Kendra McCann, Committee Clerk*



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1-19-25

Tod Fossetta  
Archangel Ministries  
620 Railroad Ave.  
Homestead, MT 59242

Dear Senators and Representatives:

My name is Tod Fossetta and I am presenting myself to this committee to share testimony regarding HB1361.

I have over 30 years experience working with domestic violence and sex trafficking victims, organizations, shelters and other support services. I am an Ambassador for Shared Hope International, a sex trafficking prevention organization with over 1000 trained ambassadors, and one of the nation's leading policy and political action teams. I have worked with organizations including the Pierce County Coalition for Domestic Violence and the Women's Crisis Shelter in Williston, ND. I have training through Shared Hope, Operation Underground Railroad and the Association for the Recovery of Children. I am a US Army Veteran, and since the murder of my sister in an act of domestic violence in 1984, I believe the Lord has called me to this vocation. I am the Founder of Archangel Ministries, through which I work with victims, organizations and church groups. One of my primary goals is to educate men on the dangers of pornography, buying sex and the effect it has on them, the community, and the women exploited for those uses.

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I would like to offer my experience and knowledge to answer any questions the committee may have. I do not have a specific testimony laid out, except to give



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an overview on the damage caused by sex trafficking, how victims are treated, the nature of the perpetrators, and the need to address it in an aggressive manner.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Tod Fossetta



NORTH DAKOTA  
YOUNG REPUBLICANS



701-220-0624



P.O. Box 240, Bismarck, ND 58502



Leadership@NDYR.org

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1361

Chairwoman Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for hearing testimony for HB 1361. I write this testimony in strong support of the bill.

It is no insignificant task that you are faced with when determining the policy and subsequent laws associated with the enforcement of offenses for human trafficking.

As with the creation of any law where there are substantial consequences to individuals, we must consider the rights and dignity of all involved, to react with proper and righteous action.

When it comes to the conversation on how to approach human trafficking crimes in ND, there are four parties to consider: The first being Victims and the lifelong consequences they will suffer. Second, the Public and their right to safety. Third, the offender and just punishment. Fourth, the government and what legal and moral responsibility are employed in addressing the circumstances.

There is no question that a victim of human trafficking is subjected to diabolical harm and injustice that amounts to modern-day slavery. Because of this they are owed justice and healing, which the reality is that they can never fully receive.

The public's safety is also harmed, and their sense of security is stolen from them. They are owed the restoration of trust and confidence in their security.

An offender, who is found guilty, must pay this debt but also should not be subject to cruel or unusual punishment when sentenced.

It is the lawmakers' duty to balance the interests of all parties to set up a system that will deliver justice across the board.

HB 1361 would establish mandatory minimum sentencing, which would impose a larger burden on people found guilty of human trafficking, and the question would be whether or not this change to current sentencing guidelines would bring us closer to, or push us further from, true and righteous judgment.

Regarding mandatory minimum sentences, in general, I do not support them. The data does show that for good and lasting reform and rehabilitation of offenders to take place, there must be an incentive for good behavior. Void of the natural emotional response, long-term incarceration and mandatory minimums, in general, have been shown to achieve the opposite of this goal. However, this is when considering the dignity and well-being of the offender. As I have mentioned the just interest of the victim and of the public need to be considered as well.

I was unable to find a single study that was able to quantify the success rate of reform and rehabilitation regarding human trafficking offenders. Without this data, in my opinion, it is hard to navigate and have total confidence in what is the best path forward.

Considering this fact, is it fair to place further burden on human trafficking offenders by imposing longer mandatory prison sentences, which potentially makes it harder to reform and rehabilitate them, without the hard data showing that this change will have the intended effect?

At a time when human trafficking has exploded, due to the violent and heinous nature of these crimes, many important conversations are happening, with different ideas on how to approach and better address the increasing presence of human trafficking in our society; not only for prevention but also for deterring people from choosing to commit these evil types of offenses. It would appear that the current approach is failing and to this, we must ask: what are the consequences of continuing this approach? Do the increasing instances of human trafficking offenses warrant changing nothing?

These questions are all important, but I believe the most important question to be asking is: is it most prudent to prioritize the interest of a guilty party; or should we prioritize the interest of two innocent parties, i.e. - victims and public safety?

Since we do not have the data to show that there is or can be success in reforming and rehabilitating these types of offenders, can we take the risk, at the expense of potential victims and public security, of the grave consequences of sentencing human trafficking offenders less harshly?

There are many questions, but one thing is 100% certain and effective: when these types of criminals are removed from the public, they cannot create more victims or attack the security of society and the longer they are removed, the longer innocent individuals and the general public aren't at risk from potential re-offense by the offender.

Respected members of the committee, it is due to these circumstances and the discerning ideas that I have conveyed, that I urge a DO PASS on HB 1361 to prioritize victims and the security of the public until we can be confident that lighter sentencing for these atrocious types of crimes is in the best interest of ALL parties; especially that of the innocent.

Thank you again for your consideration on this matter.

**Rory Somsen**  
*NDYR Secretary*



**NORTH DAKOTA  
YOUNG REPUBLICANS**



701-220-0624



P.O. Box 240, Bismarck, ND 58502



Leadership@NDYR.org



*Representing the Diocese of Fargo  
and the Diocese of Bismarck*

103 South Third Street  
Suite 10  
Bismarck ND 58501  
701-223-2519  
ndcatholic.org  
ndcatholic@ndcatholic.org

**To:** Senate Judiciary Committee  
**From:** David Tamsiea, Executive Director  
**Date:** March 18, 2025  
**Re:** HB 1361 — Human Trafficking Minimum Sentences

The North Dakota Catholic Conference strongly supports common-sense legislation to fight against the scourge of human trafficking and has for many years. Human trafficking violates the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of human life, and fundamental rights of the human person. All three of the last popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, have publicly decried human trafficking and called for its eradication and for the protection of its victims. Our two North Dakotan bishops, Bishop David Kagan and Bishop John Folda, have asked that human trafficking be made a legislative priority. This session, the North Dakota Catholic Conference has testified in support of five different bills aimed at combatting human trafficking. No one should doubt our resolve and commitment to address this difficult issue.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference takes no position on the wisdom of imposing minimum sentences for human trafficking. But the Conference has deep concerns about the amount of years set for minimum sentences for human traffickers under HB 1361:

- Class AA felony Mandatory minimum sentence of 40 years in prison without parole compared to a maximum sentence of life in prison without parole.
- Class A felony Mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years in prison without parole compared to a maximum of 20 years in prison.
- Class B felony Mandatory minimum sentence of 7 years in prison without parole compared to a maximum of 10 years in prison.

**HB 1361 Takes Away a Judge's Discretion:** The first concern with this bill is that it virtually eliminates a judge's ability to exercise discretion in imposing sentences. Under current law, a judge can draw upon his prudence, experience, and good judgment to determine the most appropriate sentence for a convicted criminal defendant after hearing the facts of each case. A judge currently is required to consider factors like strong provocation by others, no prior criminal history, and cooperation with law enforcement to bring other offenders to justice, to consider a less severe sentence that would be more in keeping with a just result (NDCC 12.1-32.04). HB 1361 largely takes that discretion away by imposing "one-size-fits-all" minimum sentences not that much different than the maximum sentences for these classes of felonies.

**HB 1361 Introduces Widely Disproportionate Minimum Sentences:** The first concern with HB 1361 is that the proposed minimum penalties are widely disproportionate to current minimum penalties in North Dakota's Penal Code. Under current law of the North Dakota Century Code, the only existing minimum sentences for crimes in North Dakota are mandatory minimum sentences of four years imprisonment for armed offenders who use a dangerous weapon, an explosive, a destructive device, or a firearm in the commission of Class AA, Class A, or Class B felonies (NDCC 12.1-32-02.1). By way of comparison, a person convicted of murder using a deadly weapon under the current sentencing law would face a minimum sentence of four years, whereas a person convicted of human trafficking of a minor under HB 1361 would have a minimum sentence of forty years. This imposes upon a trafficker of a minor a penalty that is 10x that imposed upon an armed murderer.

**HB 1361 Imposes Excessive Punishments for Minimum Sentences:** The third concern with HB 1361 is that it is an excessive punishment, and it does not account for the other two primary purposes of criminal penalties besides retributive justice. According to the Western Christian tradition, there are three primary purposes for punishment of crimes: (1) redressing the disorder caused by the offense (justice); (2) protecting the common good of society (safety); and (3) rehabilitating the offender (medicinal). The punitive element of redressing the wrong in the order of justice must be balanced by the real possibility for criminals to experience conversion and rehabilitation and to no longer pose a threat to society, so that they could be released into society again. HB 1361's proposed penalties are not really minimum sentences, but in reality only slightly-less-than-maximum sentences that seem to disregard the possibility of rehabilitation that would allow for an earlier release from prison.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference urges the Senate Judiciary Committee to consider amending HB 1361 to provide lower and more reasonable minimum sentences for human trafficking offenders if it decides to issue a DO PASS recommendation on the bill.



### Testimony Supporting House Bill 1361

Jacob Thomsen, Policy Analyst  
North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action  
March 18, 2025

Madam Chair Larson and honorable members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Jacob Thomsen, and I am a Policy Analyst with North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action. I am testifying on behalf of our organization in support of House Bill 1361 and respectfully request that you render a "DO PASS" on this bill.

Our organization believes that every person has inherent worth, and dignity given from God. Human trafficking, in its various forms, steals that worth and dignity away from the people who are victims of it. A person becomes dehumanized and is turned into a product, rather than a soul with worth, capability, and potential. They deserve to be loved. That feeling of love gets ripped away when people are bought and sold like a commodity.

This bill targets traffickers in our state and sends the message that the citizens of North Dakota are committed to making sure that those who commit abhorrent crimes such as this face significant penalties. This bill sends the message that North Dakota will not tolerate exploitation and slavery.

According to statistics from the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force, from late 2015 through 2022, there were 701 victims of human trafficking that were served by the task force<sup>1</sup>. Following that, 130 new victims were served in 2023<sup>2</sup>, which means that around 831 total victims have been served by the Task Force through the end of 2023. This is a serious problem that has affected the lives of hundreds of North Dakotans. These victims deserve justice, and this bill delivers it firmly.

This bill is also timely. In talking with The Lifeguard Group, an organization out of Montana that also does work in Western North Dakota, we were told that the Bakken oil boom found sex

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<sup>1</sup> Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission, "2022 Annual Human Trafficking Report," *North Dakota Office of Attorney General*, 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5952cff2cd0f6834a8f6ead8/t/6725254c10310f3e74861f9e/1730487629771/2022+AG+Report+FINAL-compressed.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force, "2023 Annual Human Trafficking Report," 2023, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5952cff2cd0f6834a8f6ead8/t/67251ef1acd40d4bf3ba9344/1730486002569/2023+NDHTTF+Annual+Human+Trafficking+Report.pdf>

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**1515 Burnt Boat Dr., Suite C-148, Bismarck, ND 58503**  
**jacob@Ndfamilyalliance.org**  
**701-355-6425**  
**www.ndfamilyalliance.org**

traffickers leaving Las Vegas to come to North Dakota because business was better here. With President Trump in office, there is a great chance that the oil business in our state will expand once again, and the sex trafficking industry won't be too far behind it.

We believe that we are in the perfect time and place as a state to pass this bill into law and let the sex trafficking industry know that they are not welcome here and that they will be met with heavy penalties if it happens.

North Dakota needs to be a state that is tough on human traffickers for the sake of its most vulnerable citizens. We cannot be a state that lets human trafficking go unnoticed. For these reasons, North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action requests that you vote "DO PASS" on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will stand for any questions.





**Stacy Schaffer, 31:8 Project**  
**[schaffer@318project.org](mailto:schaffer@318project.org)**  
**701.557.3750**

**Piper Bjornsen, Lived-Experience Expert, 31:8 Project**  
**[piper\\_bjornsen@icloud.com](mailto:piper_bjornsen@icloud.com)**  
**701.955.3464**

***In support of House Bill 1361***

Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this introduction. My name is Stacy Schaffer and I am the Executive Director of 31:8 Project. We are a Bismarck-based nonprofit that was founded in 2015 dedicated to equipping and challenging society to proactively address human trafficking through education, advocacy, and awareness. Our work is accomplished through program areas including education and human trafficking survivor mentorship. In 2024, we were privileged to provide services to over 60 survivors of human trafficking, 85% of whom were trafficked within North Dakota. Additionally, we delivered nearly 170 presentations statewide to a diverse range of audiences, including law enforcement, schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations. This year, we will host our *5th Annual Bakken Human Trafficking Summit* in Bismarck, with the goal of educating over 400 professionals and community members. Today, it is my honor to introduce Piper Bjornsen, a lived experience expert of human trafficking that has been part of 31:8 Project's *Survivor Mentorship Program*. Her courage to testify on her own behalf is a powerful reminder of why we must address this issue with urgency and compassion. Piper brings firsthand insight into the realities of human trafficking, and both of us will be available for questions regarding our support of House Bill 1361.



Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Piper Bjornsen, and like many other survivors of human trafficking, I endured physical and sexual abuse at a young age. Looking back on it, I see how it negatively affected my outlook on relationships and what a loving partner is. It showed a pattern in my life with every relationship I was in.

It is human nature to want love and acceptance; finding someone who “gets us”.

Unfortunately, when you're dealing with past sexual trauma and you don't understand PTSD, often you use drugs to self-medicate. For as long as I could, I ran as fast and hard right into the arms of my trafficker, which occurred in Williston, North Dakota.

Often when I tell people my story or hear others' opinions on human trafficking, people ask the question "why didn't you leave", and it's difficult to answer. When I got into the "life", which is another phrase for human trafficking, I did not realize what was happening.

Traffickers feed off your insecurities. They know what you need to establish trust and say all the right things. I felt like he was giving me so much and I wanted to appeal to him. It was an extreme situation and a very dangerous lifestyle. But I survived.

Years later, while I was serving a prison sentence in North Dakota due to my trafficking situation, I got a visit from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and Homeland Security. They had some questions for me about my ex-boyfriend, the trafficker. We met over the course of my prison sentence and put the pieces together. It took time for me to realize the situation I had been in. I was part of a 5-year investigation and just one of many women who fell victim to my trafficker. When I got out of prison, I testified against him in a

federal courtroom. It is believed that he trafficked close to 30 people in North Dakota and around the nation. He got a 20-year sentence.

For each human trafficking case, justice looks different. In fact, many survivors have not seen successful prosecutions take place in these situations. I have seen time and time again traffickers receive little to no sentencing, and these are career criminals literally walking amongst us today. That is why legislative measures, such as House Bill 1361, are critical in ensuring that sentences reflect the severity of these crimes. Through my work with 31:8 Project, one of my goals has been to increase minimum sentences regarding human trafficking cases. I am truly honored to be here today to share part of my story with you. Thank you all for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

# 2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

## Judiciary Committee Peace Garden Room, State Capitol

HB 1361  
3/26/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 12.1-41 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to mandatory minimum sentences for human trafficking offenders; and to provide a penalty.

3:41 p.m. Chair Larson opened the hearing.

Members present:

Chair Larson, Vice Chairman Paulson, Senators: Castaneda, Cory, Luick, Myrdal, Braunberger.

### Discussion Topics:

- Federal versus state law discrepancies
- Class A felony classifications
- Class B felony classifications

3:42 p.m. Senator Myrdal introduced Representative Johnston's proposed amendment LC# 25.0961.01000 and submitted testimony #44228.

3:43 p.m. Jacob Thomsen, Policy Analyst, North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action, testified as neutral and answered committee questions about proposed amendment.

3:55 p.m. Senator Myrdal moved amendment LC# 25.0961.01001.

3:55 p.m. Senator Braunberger seconded.

3:56 p.m. Voice Vote - Motion Passed.

3:56 p.m. Senator Myrdal moved a Do Pass as amended.

3:56 p.m. Senator Luick seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Diane Larson	Y
Senator Bob Paulson	Y
Senator Ryan Braunberger	Y
Senator Jose L. Castaneda	Y
Senator Claire Cory	Y
Senator Larry Luick	Y
Senator Janne Myrdal	Y

Motion Passed 7-0-0.

3:57 p.m. Senator Cory will carry the bill.

3:58 p.m. Committee discussion on upcoming schedule.

3:59 p.m. Chair Larson adjourned.

*Kendra McCann, Committee Clerk*

March 26, 2025

CO  
3/26/25  
1 of 1

Sixty-ninth  
Legislative Assembly  
of North Dakota

## PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

### HOUSE BILL NO. 1361

Introduced by

Representatives D. Johnston, Jonas, Kiefert, Schauer

Senators Myrdal, Boehm

- 1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 12.1-41 of the North Dakota  
2 Century Code, relating to mandatory minimum sentences for human trafficking offenders; and to  
3 provide a penalty.

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

- 5 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 12.1-41 of the North Dakota Century Code is created  
6 and enacted as follows:

7 **Prohibited acts - Mandatory terms of imprisonment.**

- 8 A person who violates a provision of this chapter is subject to mandatory minimum  
9 sentencing requirements to be served without the benefit of parole as follows:

- 10 1. For a class AA felony, the court shall impose a minimum sentence of ~~forty~~twenty years'  
11 imprisonment.
- 12 2. For a class A felony, the court shall impose a minimum sentence of ~~fifteen~~ten years'  
13 imprisonment.
- 14 3. For a class B felony, the court shall impose a minimum sentence of ~~seven~~five years'  
15 imprisonment.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE  
HB 1361**

**Judiciary Committee (Sen. Larson, Chairman)** recommends **AMENDMENTS** **(25.0961.01001)** and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** (7 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1361 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

25.0961.01000

Sixty-ninth  
Legislative Assembly  
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15 imprisonment.