

**SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**  
**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2159**  
**“Human Trafficking Survivor Supports”**

**Senator Larson and Committee Members.** My name is Jessica Thomasson, and I serve as CEO for Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. I am here to support the request for the appropriation for human trafficking survivor supports in the Attorney General’s budget, at the level of \$1.5 million as proposed.

We are one of several private organizations who works with survivors of human trafficking in North Dakota. Our particular area of expertise is related to labor trafficking. Labor trafficking typically involves immigrants who come to the country seeking employment opportunities. In our state, they are most often seeking employment in the agricultural sector but it can include other workplaces as well, like hotels and restaurants.

Victims of human trafficking are forced to work intentionally exhausting hours, live in their place of work, are often physically and sexually abused, and are put under constant surveillance. Most workers were not born in the United States and their immigration status, unfamiliarity with the law, and the language barrier are used to exploit them.

In a typical scenario, the trafficker will withhold the worker’s passport and other legal documents, citing an obligation the worker has to “earn the documents back” for some reason or other. Once the trafficker has the worker’s documents, the employer is then able to force the immigrant to work long hours, often without much if any pay. The immigrant will often go without medical care, even if they are injured while working. They can’t leave their “employer” because they no longer have their immigration paperwork, and they are afraid to report the

abuses because of the constant threat levied by the “employer” that they will “make sure they get deported”.

In carrying out this work, Lutheran Social Services works with Youthworks and the ND Council on Abused Women’s Services and is a member of the ND Human Trafficking Task Force. We know that it takes many organizations working together to help human trafficking survivors find their way back to safe, stable community life. Victims of labor trafficking in North Dakota have shown up in both the state’s cities, towns and rural areas. The State of North Dakota’s support for human trafficking survivor services is essential to the statewide network’s ability to serve people whenever and wherever the need arises.

Labor trafficking in North Dakota is rare but serious. It takes an integrated network of providers, working together with law enforcement and the faith community to effectively help victims who are trapped in situations that are the equivalent of modern-day slavery. The investment made in the network will ensure that we are able to provide effective, trauma-informed services, that can overcome language barriers, build support systems, and help people heal and find a way forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today, and for your support for survivors of human trafficking. I would be happy to answer any questions you have for me.

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