

**SENATE APPROPRIATIONS -GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS DIVISION
SENATOR TERRY WANZEK, CHAIR
MARCH 8, 2023**

**TOM ERHARDT, DIRECTOR, PAROLE AND PROBATION
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1015**

Chairman Wanzek and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee – Government Operations Division, my name is Tom Erhardt, and I am the Director of Parole and Probation, a division of the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR). I stand before you today to testify in favor of House Bill 1015.

The DOCR's Parole and Probation Division employs 149 staff, 98 are sworn peace officers as required by N.D.C.C. Section 12-59-20. The Parole and Probation Division has 17 district offices throughout the state serving our communities by supervising approximately 6,500 adults who are released from incarceration to parole, sentenced to probation or ordered to pretrial supervision by the district courts, or transferred from other states via the Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision.

A parole and probation officer's job is unique in that we take on two roles. Our primary role is helping the individuals we supervise find resources, teaching them prosocial skills to handle risky situations, and providing mentorship so they can desist from crime. The second role is holding these individuals accountable to the conditions of supervision and enforcing those conditions, including enforcement of the laws of this state.

A parole and probation officer's day can vary widely. A parole and probation officer may be conducting routine office visits during which the parole and probation officer meets with individuals, drug tests them, refers them to needed services, and coaches them on avoiding risky situations. However, the next day, or even moments later, the officer may participate in a drug raid with dangerous, uncooperative suspects or conduct announced and unannounced home visits of supervised individuals to detect and intervene in their activities at home. Officers are increasingly encountering danger, including fentanyl, firearms, and dangerous weapons. In 2021 and 2022, officers conducted 583 searches, confiscating over 31 pounds of illegal narcotics, 57 illegally possessed firearms (handguns, rifles, shotguns) and, among other prohibited items, 2 live hand grenades. Many times, this dichotomy happens at a moment's notice and parole and probation officers must "switch gears" from office visits to field operations to complete their duties.

One very important process that parole and probation staff are a part of is the that of re-entry. Incarcerated individuals who are getting ready for release may have supervision following release either via parole or probation. Individuals work with their case managers to submit plans that are investigated by parole and probation staff. Also, during this time, the case manager may refer the individual to Free Through Recovery where a care coordinator will assist with helping the individual with needs in the community. When the individual is released, he or she will report to the assigned staff member per instructions. Staff will conduct risk assessment updates, establish rapport, ensure the

individual understands the conditions of supervision, refer for resources, and provide additional reporting instructions. Individuals may reside in Transitional Facilities, community placements, or a treatment center – each release plan is unique. This re-entry phase can be quite challenging for these individuals. As I stated earlier, in cooperation with Free Through Recovery, parole and probation staff supervise the individuals first to help, and if the individual does not desist from criminal behaviors, then to hold accountable.

Parole and Probation faces many challenges. One challenge is high caseloads in several areas of the state. The House of Representatives removed several FTE positions from the Executive Budget, and I look forward to conversations about our need for these positions in future budget hearings in the hope that they could be reinstated. Our goal is to have caseload averages in the 40-45 range for staff to be even more effective with their clients. These positions will help achieve that goal.

Thank you for considering Parole and Probation's budget requests within the full DOCR budget in HB 1015 so that we can further fulfill our mission. I will stand to answer any questions I can. Thank you.