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## **Armstrong signs package of bills designed to support recovery and reentry, reduce recidivism**

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**BISMARCK, N.D. (APRIL 29, 2025)** – Gov. Kelly Armstrong today signed a package of three bills focused on reentry practices that will make North Dakota safer. The new laws focus resources on efforts that interrupt crime, promote recovery and help people leaving prison and jails successfully transition back to the community.

“As I said during my first State of the State address in January, we can’t build our way out of the prison overcrowding problem in North Dakota. We need to be smart on crime, not soft on crime,” Armstrong said. “We appreciate the Legislature and the many partners involved in developing this legislation for providing North Dakotans with a practical approach to public safety that centers on accountability, recovery and reentry.”

House Bills [1425](#), [1417](#) and [1549](#) were introduced by Rep. Larry Klemin and co-sponsored by Rep. Karla Rose Hanson, Rep. Greg Stemen, Sen. Kyle Davison and Sen. Diane Larson. The bills received widespread support in both chambers for their multi-pronged approach to public safety improvements. Lt. Gov. Michelle Strinden and state Commissioner of Recovery and Reentry Jonathan Holth also testified in support of the bills.

“Given the volume of support from prosecutors, public safety officers, community partners and several state agencies throughout the legislative process, it’s clear that these policies move our criminal justice system in the right direction,” Klemin said.

The bills emerged from a rigorous, year-long initiative led by the North Dakota Justice Reinvestment Initiative Reentry Study Work Group, a team of 15 experienced legislators, leaders from the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) and Department of Health and Human Services, court system officials, county jail experts and community partners who dedicated the interim session to reviewing North Dakota’s criminal justice data and reentry

services. The Work Group's final report became the roadmap for the policies included in the three bills.

Together, the bills target reentry from several points of North Dakota's criminal justice system. Policies include support for public safety partners in operating programs that redirect people in need of treatment or other services to the proper care setting; the elimination of certain criminal justice fees that have diminishing returns; and stronger collaborations between state agencies to secure state identification and medical coverage for people leaving correctional facilities.

The package also lays the groundwork for future efforts to update criminal justice data collection, programming and housing improvements, and other advancements.

"This legislation is another example of our state's longtime commitment to using data, research and collaboration to make meaningful changes to improve the lives of all North Dakotans," Hanson said. "This next step in criminal justice reform exemplifies the smart-on-crime approach supported by the state Legislature and Gov. Armstrong."

Following is an explanation of the three bills:

- **HB 1425** establishes a pilot program in three counties to support State's Attorney's offices that operate diversion programs. The pilot provides supervision services to oversee the programs, better ensuring that participants complete program requirements successfully. It also provides clarity around the use of deflection practices, which is when law enforcement or other first responders bring someone who is not a danger to the public but needs services to a care setting instead of jail. Finally, the bill calls for an updated evaluation of outcomes and cost savings from the DOCR's Pretrial Services Program.
- **HB 1417** adds and updates key criminal justice definitions to help criminal justice agencies improve cross-system collaboration and data collection practices. The bill also eliminates certain criminal fees that have little return on investment and proposes examining additional criminal justice fees to determine their collection rate and impact on state revenue.
- **HB 1549** aims to better prepare people leaving jails and prisons to return to their communities and stay there safely, instead of cycling back into the criminal justice system. The policies included will help expand evidence-based programming in local jails, improve cross-agency collaborations, and streamline processes for providing identification and Medicaid access to people exiting prison. The bill also includes three elements for continued study: the creation of a task force to address housing barriers, an examination of criminal justice system data collection and sharing, and a legislative management study on record sealing and expungement.

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