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# Office of the Sheriff

Jesse Jahner, Sheriff

Date: May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024

RE: Testimony on current Border Security and its effects on Public Safety.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security and Enforcement,

My name is Jesse Jahner, and I am the elected Sheriff of Cass County, North Dakota. Cass County has a population of approximately 186,562 citizens. The Cass County Sheriff's Office has approximately 235 employee positions, and the Cass County Jail houses 348 inmates. Currently, our jail is over capacity, and many of those capacity issues are related to addiction, mental health, and homelessness. There are two major highways that run through Cass County: Interstate 94, which travels east and west, and Interstate 29, which travels north and south, connecting North Dakota and Cass County to the Canadian border.

Over the past year (2023), I had the honor and privilege of serving as the President of the Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association. Moving forward, I will be representing the North Dakota Sheriffs as a Board Member Liaison to the National Sheriff's Association. The Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association represents all 119 Sheriffs in the states of North and South Dakota. I wrote the attached letter on behalf of the Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association and the Sheriff's represented by the Association. That letter expressed our concerns as North Dakota and South Dakota Sheriffs over border security in this country on both the northern and southern borders. That letter was not intended to define a political agenda, political lines, or political divisions as it relates to border security but to bring awareness and address concerns as they relate to public safety, strains on our criminal justice system, narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, and homelessness in our country and communities.

Oftentimes, when people think of the "border crisis," they immediately think that border security only concerns the southern parts of the United States. Although these areas have been largely impacted and have experienced significant changes in their community's safety, narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, and violence, we in North Dakota and South Dakota are starting to see changes in our communities as it relates to these same issues. In North and South Dakota, we

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are seeing increases in narcotics trafficking and overdoses, a rise in mental health and addiction-related crimes, and homelessness, all of which are placing huge strains on our public safety infrastructure, including mental health and addiction services and incarceration capacity issues. I have attached the entire contents of the letter I submitted on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, to both our North and South Dakota Congressional Delegates as part of this testimony.

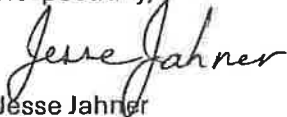
In addition to the increase in narcotics trafficking, we have also noticed what I would describe as a decrease in assistance from our Federal Partners when it comes to dealing with situations where we come into contact with individuals who have come into the country illegally. In prior years, when law enforcement came into contact with these individuals, our federal partners, such as Border Patrol, would come out to assist us if we called them, whether it was to help further identify criminal histories or to investigate an illegal status. On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, The Cass County Sheriff's Office was dispatched to a situation in Absaraka, a small rural community in Cass County, where a group of individuals were trespassing on a homeowner's property. When confronted by the homeowner, those individuals fled the scene. It was additionally reported that they had a weapon inside the vehicle. My Deputies arrived on the scene a short time later and made contact with the responsables. Through that contact, they learned that the responsables were living at a residence in Absaraka and that there were possibly 10 to 12 people occupying the structure. Additionally, it was learned that most of them residing in the residence were in the country illegally. During that contact, my Deputies on scene contacted Border Patrol for assistance in working through the situation, looking for assistance with language translation, conducting more thorough criminal history background checks, checking citizenship status, and making sure that there were no signs of trafficking. The Border Patrol Agent that my Deputies made contact with told them (statements and information is paraphrased) that due to the current political environment, he was not optimistic that they would be able to assist us. My Deputy mentioned to the agent that he was going to inform me of the situation, and the agent mentioned that it might be a good idea that I, as the Sheriff, may carry more weight in getting their assistance. Given that conversation, I tried to make contact with Border Patrol the very next day (Thursday) to see if they could go out to the residence with me to investigate the identity of these individuals further, make sure they did not have violent criminal histories, and make sure that there was no trafficking associated with the residence. In attempting to make contact with Border Patrol, I was given what I would describe as a huge runaround and a lack of priority for the next five days. On the fifth day (following Monday), I was finally given an answer by an agent who told me that they would not be assisting us. When I asked why, he stated that their office was extremely busy and that they were lacking the necessary resources to assist. I also reached out to Homeland Security Investigations and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) around this same time. ICE was more accommodating and went out to the residence with me. In addition to this situation, when my deputies have come into contact with people in the country illegally during traffic stops, Border Patrol will not come out to assist. In the past, this was not an issue.

Additionally, we are aware and extremely concerned over the increased threats of terrorist attacks and potential violence towards our communities from those crossing the border. I regularly attend our local Joint Terrorism Task Force meetings and am briefed continually about threats to our communities. I know from these briefings that these threats are at an all-time high, and it's not a

question of if something is going to happen; it's a matter of when, how big of an impact it will have, and how many of our citizens will be affected.

In closing, border security issues and the direction given to some federal agencies are hindering the ability of law enforcement to provide public safety and protect our citizens. In North Dakota, Sheriff's do not run on political party lines. My number one priority as the Cass County Sheriff is to provide safety and security to the citizens I serve. Communities cannot thrive if they are not safe. The current lack of immigration enforcement, policies, and resources are causing our communities to become unsafe. Without a good safety infrastructure and secure borders in place, we are going to continue to see loss of life through narcotics trafficking, overdoses, and violence. I am respectfully asking that all of our elected officials remain true to your oath of office, advocate for the enforcement of our immigration laws, and provide the resources necessary to secure our north and south borders so that we can keep our communities and citizens safe. Finally, I want to thank this subcommittee for giving me and the citizens of Cass County the opportunity to voice our concerns and testify before you today in order to provide this information.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jesse Jahner". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Jesse Jahner  
Cass County Sheriff

