

I have lived in Bismarck since 2006, and I believe now is the right time to pass this kind of legislation. In my experience, Bismarck is full of friendly people willing to help fellow residents out in many different circumstances – from digging out cars stuck in snow drifts, to quickly raising funds for any number of local causes, to simply smiling at those they pass on the street. Let's pass this bill and help Bismarck retain its reputation for friendliness and generosity.

It is not good, of course, to commit an offense of any sort, but bias crimes have an extra chilling effect on their targets. Bias crimes often leave victims feeling scared, vulnerable, and unprotected in their own communities. People who commit bias crimes cause harm to other human beings not for the common reasons of greed or revenge or jealousy, but simply because they do not like some immutable quality of that person (or group). These qualities include a person's race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, color, or country of national origin.

Not surprisingly, the victim of a bias crime (and the victim's community) is often left feeling terrified, angry, and distrustful of other groups in the community. Because they were targeted, they start to see other groups of people as threats, causing ripples of fear and strife to flow through a city society. The city runs the risk of groups of people separating themselves into isolated silos, each suspicious and wary of the others.

We want to work together in Bismarck to continue to be a welcoming and open place both for newcomers and for those who have been here for generations. Passing this bias crime legislation can help achieve that goal.

Please provide a Do Pass on this bill – and help all residents of Bismarck feel welcome.

Thank you,

Hannah Vanorny