

**Testimony Presented on HB 1537 to the
House Judiciary Committee**

Representative Lawrence R. Klemin, Chairman

Cody Severson, Chair, Fargo Human Rights Commission

February 6, 2023

Chairman Klemin, members of the House Judiciary Committee, I wish to speak in support of HB 1537, on behalf of the members of the Fargo Human Rights Commission. We recognize that hate crimes happen in our community and our state. According to the FBI, there were 21 reported hate crimes in North Dakota in 2020.

North Dakota is one of four states without effective hate crime legislation. This legislation would provide equal protection for all North Dakota residents, visitors, and workers.

We know that law enforcement including rank, file and leadership of the Fargo Police Department support state hate/bias crime legislation as it would provide law enforcement additional options to address and hold accountable those who would commit a crime based on someone's protected status.

A strong aspect of this bill is the fact that protected communities are enumerated. Any resident could be subject to a hate crime, but it is important that communities known to be at higher risk are clearly listed. Members of communities, of color, of minority religion, of the Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender community, of communities of people with disabilities are known to receive the greatest amount of hate directed at them.

We also support the importance HB 1537 places upon data collection and training of members of law enforcement. As much as we are encouraged and support the efforts of the Fargo Police Department to address this need, we recognize the importance of consistency throughout the state and believe appropriations to support the implementation of the measure will aid law enforcement agencies.

We recognize that hate crime goes largely unreported. The reasons for this are many: people do not know of their rights, they may fear retaliation, or they do not believe their community would support them.

In June of 2021, Fargo became the first North Dakota city to pass a hate crimes ordinance. We are proud of this action and believe it announced the fact that the city believes that all residents of our community have a right to live with safety, security and with out fear. Such an ordinance, however, has limitations that only a statewide law can address.

Passing HB1537 sends a clear and inconvertible message: our communities do not sanction hate at any level. We ask a DO PASS on HB1537.