

Olivia Data
Testimony on HB 1205
January 17, 2023

Greetings, Chairman Klemin and members of the committee. My name is Olivia Data, I am a North Dakota resident and a freshman at Harvard College, and I am here today to urge you to vote “Do Pass” on HB 1537.

Growing up here, I’ve always heard about how the Midwest, with our “ya, you betcha’s” and our thousand casserole recipes, is a region full of love, kindness, and togetherness. We look out for our neighbors; we support our communities. So why are we turning our backs on marginalized groups?

North Dakota may be a place full of kindness, but it is also a place that has a long way to go in terms of seeing equality. Hate crimes do happen here, and they don’t just affect individuals. They affect entire communities. When we don’t have laws to help victims accurately report bias crimes, to help officers respond to bias crimes, to help hold perpetrators accountable for the harm they have done, we are telling these communities that their safety does not matter. We are telling them that their fears are not valid, that their voices are not heard.

I know that for many of us, being a victim of a hate crime is unthinkable. Maybe you are not part of a protected class, or maybe you have not directly experienced discrimination. But I ask you to think beyond the scope of individual instances of bias crimes and consider the prejudice in our state as a whole. People of color and people in the LGBTQ+ community especially often report feeling disenfranchised and disrespected here. Young people like me have grown ashamed of our hometowns because of the prejudice we’ve seen within them.

When I was in high school, I had friends of mine jeopardize their education to graduate early just so that they could leave our state faster. I have friends now who say they never want to move back here after college because they don’t feel safe in their own hometown. I love North Dakota. I was born here. I was raised here. My family is here. But I don’t want to live in a place that refuses to protect my loved ones.

We must do better in terms of supporting marginalized communities. North Dakota may be a place full of good old Midwestern kindness, but that kindness must apply to everyone.

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Communities threatened by bias crimes deserve to be protected. They deserve to know that all of us will stand up for their safety. We all deserve to be proud of our state for being someplace that promotes equality and compassion.

I ask you to support HB 1537 because it will go a long way in showing not only the perpetrators of bias crimes, but all those who may be affected by bias crimes, that we as North Dakotans will not tolerate hatred and prejudice in our home.

Thank you for your time.

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