

HB 1537 is a bill whose time has come. We have had racial slurs shouted at school sports events; we have college students who think hanging nooses and putting up swastika signs is harmless “fun”; and we have people who use disrespectful to hateful language to people whose religious affiliation is different than theirs, whose skin color is different than theirs, who are relatively new arrivals in the US [while conveniently forgetting their own relatives’ of previous generations “new arrival” status in the US]; who bully, mock, or try to harm persons with disabilities as a form of recreation for the mockers; who think that gay-bashing or LGBTQ-bashing should be a new sport and would like to help initiate it. None of these behaviors is OK, nor is it “free speech.” It is harmful speech and an offense to public conscience and to public policy.

Training peace officers in identifying, responding to calls about such behavior, reporting such behavior, investigating such behavior, and pursuing penalties for assault, harassment, and criminal mischief [as defined in the bill text] is a must, for all law enforcement officers, at all levels in the state.

We cannot fall back on claims of being North Dakota nice and assertions that such behavior doesn’t happen here or is only occasional “rogue” behavior. In some areas, it is becoming endemic. It is inexcusable and a crime against people’s dignity and right to live peacefully in our society. We need to come together to show our support of and welcome to all persons in North Dakota. Please vote in favor of House Bill 1537.