



**67th Legislative Assembly, House Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing on House Bill 1443
February 8th, 2021**

Good Morning. My name is Kelly Gorz and I am the Associate Director of High Plains Fair Housing Center, a private nonprofit with the mission to strengthen communities and ensure equal access to housing across North Dakota. On behalf of High Plains Fair Housing Center and myself, I would like to thank Chairman Klemin and the House Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to speak today in support of HB1443.

Our mission is to strengthen communities and to ensure equal access to fair housing in the region through training, education, enforcement, and advocacy. Fair Housing is a right protected by federal and state laws. Fair Housing means you may freely choose a place to live without regard to your race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or because you are disabled or have children in your family and in North Dakota because you are on public assistance, because of your age, or marital status. Nationwide, fair housing centers play a key role in responding to (bias) hate crimes because of the alarming statistic that more than 30% of all (bias) hate crimes happen at or near a person's home.

Importantly, when a bias-motivated crime is committed, often, the victim's entire community is left feeling victimized, vulnerable, fearful, isolated, and unprotected by the law. The impact of bias-motivated crime is far greater than the already terrible impact on the individual. The damage to the very fabric of a community where a hate crime has occurred must also be taken into account. Hate crimes in effect, create a kind of public injury because they rapidly erode public confidence in being kept free and safe from these crimes. To that extent, crimes of this nature can traumatize entire communities.

North Dakota is one of only five states in the nation that does not currently have bias crime laws in place. There are five general types of hate crime statute classifications: penalty enhancement; independent offense; data collection; training; and civil action, remedies, or commission development. The states with the broadest and comprehensive protections against hate crime have a combination of all five of these statute classifications. High Plains Fair Housing Center has produced a research report that has been emailed to the committee members for their reference with regard to various bias crime legislation that is in place nationwide.

Bias crimes hurt all levels of a community and this is the time for North Dakota to convey that it will not tolerate crimes that intentionally send a message of fear to our neighbors. Now is the time to address this important need in our community.

Thank you for your time.

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Nothing in this letter is legal advice, for legal advice please see an attorney.