

HB 1537 Testimony

February 7, 2023

Chairmen Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sargianna Wutzke and I am writing in support of HB 1537. I am a member of the Bismarck Human Relations Committee and this year our committee testified in support of the Hate Crime Ordinance in the city of Bismarck.

HB 1537 is a much-needed bill in our state. Enacting a bias crime bill is a way that the state can show how the state prioritizes the safety of all people and that all people deserve to be treated with respect regardless of a person's differences. Bias crimes are committed based on a bias towards a certain group. The bias can be based on actual or perceived race, color, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, or ancestry according to this bill.

Currently, we do not have a standard way of tracking in our state to determine how often bias crimes are occurring. This bill would change that and there would be data available to track such things as bias crime numbers, who the bias crimes are targeting and what and where bias crimes are occurring. Another important aspect of this bill is training for police officers. Police officers would be adequately trained on distinguishing these crimes by offering the same training across the state. The information that is collected would allow for the use of bias related crime information to the public so the public can see how often this occurs in our state.

I work at Community Options, an agency that provides services to people with developmental disabilities. Hate Crimes for people with developmental disabilities is the invisible hate crime. Many times, people with developmental disabilities are not always thought of being a protected category. If this bill were to pass, disability is one of the categories that is protected. According to the ARC between 2017 and 2019, there was a 35% increase in hate crimes based on disability.

Too often people think that bias related crimes do not occur in North Dakota however there are examples to counter this where people have targeted someone based on one of the protected classes in this bill. Passing this bill will show that all people are welcome in our state and will ensure all people are protected as well.

Sargianna Wutzke