

Testimony in Support of HCR 3022 and HB 1149 (As Amended)

During a North Dakota High School Activities Association sanctioned basketball game between Bismarck High School (“BHS”) and Jamestown High School in Jamestown on January 31, 2023, multiple incidents occurred involving the use of racial slurs directed toward BHS student athletes. These slurs included monkey noises, mocking “war whoops,” and the use of the N-word vocalized by the Jamestown student section and directed toward the only nonwhite players for BHS.

We are the parents of the two student athletes from BHS targeted with the racial slurs at this game and we offer this testimony in support of HCR 3022 and HB 1149 (as amended).

The father of one of the BHS players and sister of another player attempted to bring this to the attention to the Jamestown Athletic Director. The complaint was ignored, and no action was taken to remove students or address the racialized taunts by the Jamestown student section. As a result, the Jamestown student section continued to harass the student athletes well into the second half. Following the game, one of the players brought this to both head coaches’ attention.

The emotional distress suffered by our sons cannot be overlooked or dismissed. The comments that were made and the loud chants of vehement racist taunting will have lasting emotional effects on these student athletes. It is the duty of NDHSAA and school administrators to cultivate safe and harassment-free environments for student athletes. Note that both these student athletes from BHS held themselves to their highest standard and never interacted with the crowd during this racial harassment and verbal abuse.

We feel strongly that immediate action is needed. The students and administrators at Jamestown Public School who participated in or allowed this abuse to occur must be held accountable. Additionally, policy changes are needed at NDHSAA including, but not limited to, implementing a “zero tolerance policy” for all students and fans that directly addresses and combats all incidences of hate and racism and which contains serious sanctions for those involved in such actions. Further, there should be permanent representation from Reservation School Districts on the NDHSAA Board of Directors.

While we are seeking immediate action directly from Jamestown School and NDHSAA on this matter, we support HCR 3022 and HB 1149 (as amended) and their mandate for legislative study to establish clear procedure and accountability for handling incidents like this in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

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