

February 8, 2021

Honorable members of the North Dakota House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Adam Fortwengler. I am the program coordinator at Global Friends Coalition, a nonprofit in Grand Forks that supports families who have been resettled here as refugees. I am writing in strong support of HB 1443, which would bring North Dakota's time as one of the last five states without a bias crime law to a close. Our state has one of the highest rates of reported bias crimes in the nation. Our largest communities, and no doubt many others across the state, have been rocked with horrendous crimes of hate. In Grand Forks, our community was shaken in December of 2015 when Matthew Gust targeted and firebombed Juba Café, a popular Somali restaurant in town. We've more recently seen multiple incidents of violence, harassment, and property damage targeted at people because of their race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or identity. These crimes not only harm the direct target of such acts, but also deeply affect the communities in which the target is a part of, including the larger community as a whole.

This bill provides deeper protection for ALL North Dakotans, regardless of their actual or perceived race, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, orientation, identity, or disability.

HB 1443 ensures that perpetrators of bias crimes are held accountable for their especially heinous acts. The bill further provides the two-pronged benefit of training law enforcement in acknowledging, investigating, and reporting bias crimes, and introduces more thorough statewide tracking of bias crimes in North Dakota. Better understanding the problem will help eliminate it from our communities.

I urge you to act and let the world know that hate has no home in North Dakota. Please vote "do pass" on HB 1443. Thank you.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Fortwengler', written in a cursive style.

Adam Fortwengler
Program Coordinator
Global Friends Coalition