NASW WI TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO ASSEMBLY BILL 48 ON THURSDAY APRIL 6, 2017 AT THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Chairperson Spiros and members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

My name is Marc Herstand. I have served as the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin chapter for the past 24 years. NASW WI represents social workers in all aspects of public life including child welfare, hospitals, nursing homes, community based organizations, mental health institutions and clinics, businesses, public schools, prison and jails, colleges and universities and other settings.

Blue Lives Matter. We need police in our communities for our safety and protection. My profession needs the support and protection of police officers. Many social workers make home visits and serve clients who may have mental health or substance abuse problems, and/or may be prone to violence at times. In fact probably almost every social worker has sometime in their career been threatened or faced a potentially dangerous situation that could have escalated in violence.

We would support any evidence based policies that would increase the safety of police officers. We would certainly be willing to participate in a study committee or task force that looked at police safety and police community relations and worked on recommendations for effective policies.

However there is absolutely no evidence that the bill will increase police safety. In addition it makes no sense to add police officers, or for that matter any other profession subject to threats and occasional violence, such as social workers, building inspectors, probation and parole officers or others to hate crimes legislation, which has a totally different purpose. This bill could also have the
unintended consequence of being used to punish people more harshly for resisting arrest, which is not the intent of the law. In January of this year a Louisiana Police Chief stated that anyone who resists arrest or gets physical with an officer could be charged with a hate crime.¹

Hate crimes legislation has always had the purpose of protecting minority racial, ethnic, religious and sexual orientation groups that have historically been subject to violence, harassment and discrimination. This group includes African-Americans, Latinos, Jews, Muslims, members of the LGBT community and others. Over the last several years there has been a frightening increase in hate crimes nationwide, including in Wisconsin. The two most recent sensational hate crimes in the United States were the murder of nine worshipers at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015 and the killing of 49 people at a Gay night club in Orlando, Florida on June 13, 2016.

On a national level during the first three months of this year there have been 35 attacks on Muslims compared to 19 the previous year. These attacks have included the burning down of four mosques.² In 2017 two Jewish cemeteries were vandalized and over the last year there have been countless incidents of swastikas scrawled on homes, on college campus and other locations directed against Jews.³ In March 2017 a gun shot was fired into a classroom at a Jewish synagogue in Evansville, Indiana.⁴ In 2017 in Kansas two Indian-Americans were shot, one fatally after the attacker yelled, “Get out of my country”.⁵ A similar incident happened in the state of Washington where an attacker shot a Sikh man while saying the victim should “go back” to his own country.⁶

In Wisconsin over 300 hate crimes have been committed over the past five years. In 2012 a white supremacist attacked worshippers at a Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, killing six and wounding four others.⁷ In February 2015 in Madison at least 30 homes were vandalized with Anti-Semitic slurs and swastikas.⁸ In March 2016 in Milwaukee one Hmong couple and one Puerto Rican man were targeted for their racial background and murdered.⁹ In April 2016 a Wisconsin high school girls’ soccer match turned traumatizing after fans in the rafters were shouting racial slurs at the players from the Beloit Memorial High School, of whom a majority
were black and Hispanic. The girls were crying and deeply disturbed. In November 2016 several UW La Crosse students of color found threatening vandalism written on their apartment doors Wednesday morning after Election Day. These are just some examples.

At a time where there has been such an increase in hate crimes, vandalism and threats against racial, ethnic, religious and sexual orientation minorities, the last thing we should do is water down hate crimes legislation.

Blue Lives Matter and we as a society need to do what we can to promote support for the police and improve police community relations. However this bill is absolutely the wrong way of going about it and could lead to undermining a law that protects religious, racial, ethnic and sexual orientation minorities in our state, who also deserve our support and protection.

1. Louisiana Police Chief Shows Why the State’s ‘Blue Lives Matter” bill is So Dangerous” The Huffington Post, January 23, 2017
2. The New York Times, “Why is This Hate Different From All Other Hate”, April 2, 2017