

HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES

HB 1298

January 25, 2021

Dear Chairman Weisz and the members of the committee:

Although it is not clearly stated in this bill, there is no denying that HB 1298 is intended to discriminate against young transgendered persons in our community. In 2015, the North Dakota High School Sports Association adopted a policy regarding the inclusion of transgendered athletes and this HB is seeking to undermine that policy.

Developmental psychology has long provided evidence that gender identity is usually irreversible by age 4. This does not, however, take into account the pressure of a child's environment to live up to an expected standard. Thus, many people who do not identify as the gender that they were assigned at birth due to the presence of certain sex organs, are not open about this internal conflict regarding their sense of self and identity. Current research shows that people who do not feel supported to express themselves as they identify are more likely to suffer from depression, substance use, and experience suicidal thoughts and engage in suicidal behavior. According to the American Psychiatric Association Position Statement on Treatment of Transgender (Trans) and Gender Diverse Youth, puberty is often a time of intensifying emotional distress for these adolescents, as the physical changes that occur at puberty are at opposition with the adolescent's gender identity. The APA supports the use of medications to suppress the onset of puberty and allow the adolescent more time for cognitive and emotional development, and possibly continuing with the gender affirmation process. If indicated, the adolescent will also engage in mental health services to treat any co-existing mental health concerns. According to the same position statement, the APA asserts that "Trans-affirming treatment, such as the use of puberty suppression, is associated with the relief of emotional distress, and notable gains in psychosocial and emotional development, in trans and gender diverse youth." The APA also has a Position Statement on Discrimination Against Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals because being transgender or gender diverse implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities. Discrimination and lack of equal civil rights is damaging to the mental health of transgender and gender diverse individuals.

According to the Family Acceptance Project, compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) young adults who reported high levels of family rejection during adolescence were:

- 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide
- 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression

- 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs
- 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse.

Conversely, according to the longitudinal study TransYouth Project, transgendered children who are allowed to socially transition report similar symptoms of depression, feelings of self-worth, and slightly higher rates of anxiety as the control population of cis-gender youth. A social transition is a nonmedical decision to allow a child to change his or her first name, pronouns, hairstyle, and clothing to live everyday life as one's asserted gender.

Families will respond to their LGBT children based on their own understanding and beliefs regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. These beliefs are often guided by their community, and this bill sends a message to the parents of our community, that our state does not accept transgendered children. Additionally, if children are not feeling supported in their homes, they could find acceptance and understanding from other aspects of their community, like at school and from their athletic departments. This bill impacts their participation in school sports and risks further alienating these young people.

This bill seeks to undermine existing policy set by the NDHSSA and NCAA, is in direct violation of an Executive Order recently signed by President Biden, and the scientific data refutes the need for any such legislation. For these reasons, we ask you to limit barriers for the youth of North Dakota to engage in their community. We encourage you to vote against HB 1298.

Respectfully signed by psychiatrists of North Dakota,

Stephanie Jallen, MD

Laura Schield, MD

Andrew J. McLean, MD, MPH

Lisa Schock, MD

Ahmad Khan, MD

Lori Esprit, MD