

March 12, 2021

The Honorable Diane Larson, Chair North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee  
and Committee Members,

My name is Tara Jensen and I am a mother of a talented and hardworking transgender youth. I strongly urge you to consider a DO NOT PASS on HB 1298.

We all know that school activities play a tremendous role in shaping a person's character. Being validated and supported by friends, family and school officials literally kept my child alive. Being included in high school activities has built the confidence for my child to thrive.

This bill, if passed, sends a very clear message to transgender, non-binary and intersex youth that to the State of North Dakota they are invisible, disposable, and not worthy of the opportunity to learn valuable character-building life lessons that come with being a part of team and competition.

This bill was deliberately introduced to exclude transgender youth and strip them of their dignity under the veil of preserving equal opportunity for women's athletics. The language was specifically amended to allow for the inclusion of cisgender girls only to play on cisgender boys teams. If this bill passes it may not end with sports. Soon there may be proposals for all activities to be exclusive to only cisgender youth. Why are we so willing to marginalize a group of individuals who are already widely mistreated and misunderstood? Why not teach a valuable lesson to all youth that including others and treating people with dignity and respect should be a core value of all activities.

The idea that transgender individuals are specifically going out for sports to steal playing time or scholarships from their peers is ridiculous. For the very small percentage of the world population that is transgender, what they most desire is being accepted, validated and included. As a mother, I can assure you that a transgender individual will be one of the most self-conscious and hard-working members on the team as there is a constant pressure to be validated and valued for who they truly are, not what the world around them might perceive them to be. The current guidelines set standards for maintaining a level playing field during transitional stages for transgender youth. These kids have abided by these requirements without issue, while their cisgender peers do not need to meet any guidelines even though science proves humans all grow and mature at different ages and levels.

What I find most troubling is that the mere introduction of this bill has made it seemingly acceptable for misinformed individuals to share hateful rhetoric about transgender athletes. Since this bill passed the House, I have witnessed groups of teens harassing transgender peers as if they are somehow entitled to treat others so poorly. Discrimination is learned. Kids are not born with hate or discrimination in their hearts. Through these experiences, transgender kids have learned to navigate their lives with courage, resilience, kindness, and integrity. They have learned through their hardships how to be natural leaders. These are skills that would be valuable to any team.

Please send the right message to the people of North Dakota and prove that our state is one of equity, inclusion and opportunity for all people and where discrimination is not tolerated. I urge the Committee to recommend Do Not Pass on House Bill 1298.

Respectfully submitted,

Tara Jensen, mother



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