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CHAPLAINS ON CALL AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

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Sarah Miller
SARAH MILLER
Chief of Chaplaincy

In reference to North Dakota HB1298

Rep. Robin Weisz, Chairman
Rep. Karen Rohr, Chairwoman
North Dakota House of Representative

Date: March 15th, 2021
Original: January 24th, 2021

Greetings Honorable Robin Weisz, Chairman, and the Honorable Karen Rohr,
Chairwoman of the North Dakota House of Representatives;

I am writing as a concerned chaplain who has been following the recent controversies surrounding the Anti-Transgender Athletes Bill, from across the nation but more specifically in North Dakota (ND HB1298) regarding student-athletes competing on sports teams that align with their gender identity. This policy is unjust, and I urge you not to proceed any further. As an adult in a position of "authority", I take my responsibility seriously to advocate for equality, justice, and the protection of all individuals especially the vulnerable and our youth.

In the Name of God, the Gracious, the Compassionate-4:135 "O you who acknowledge, stand with justice as witnesses of God, even if it is against yourselves, or the parents or the relatives, rich or poor, God is more worthy of them, so do not follow your desires from being just. If you twist or turn away, then God is Ever aware of what you do."

In a nationwide study, 68% of youth were found to play a school sport, but in 2018, the HRC Foundation and researchers from the University of Connecticut found that only 24% of LGBTQ-identified youth did so. Given what we know about the positive impact that sports has on self-esteem and mental health, particularly in young people, this disparity must be taken seriously. Indeed, "LGBTQ youth who participate in sports report lower levels of feelings of worthlessness and depression and feel safer in their classrooms than their non-sports-playing LGBTQ peers." To deny transgender high school/college students the opportunity to play on sports teams that align with their gender identity would effectively bar them from participating in school sports at all; they would then lose access to many tangible and intangible benefits that

sports make available to their cisgender peers. It disturbs me greatly that in the course of this debate, those who would see North Dakota adopt a discriminatory policy will further target transgender students.

Cases from other states have already experienced this. These students have been slandered, bullied, and harassed by other students and adults who ought to know better. This is despicable behavior, and it is wholly out of keeping with the Christian faith many of these people espouse. These students deserve what all young people deserve; the chance to grow up in a community that cares for them, advocates for them, and sets them on a course toward happy and meaningful adulthoods. Instead, they have been subjected to consistent attempts at character assassination over their supposed crime of competing in high school/college sports.

In *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, the Supreme Court has established an important precedent: one can not discriminate on the basis of LGBTQ identity with discriminating in part on the basis of sex. This means our students are entitled to protection under Title IX, the very law that is currently being weaponized against them. It goes without saying that the state of North Dakota has nothing to gain by adopting a policy that would almost certainly be found to be in violation of current federal laws against sex discrimination. That said, discrimination based on gender identity is not wrong only because it is inextricably linked to discrimination based on sex. It is wrong in and of itself.

In several different places, the Bible and the Qur'an speaks of God who shows no partiality, and in Proverbs of the Bible, we ourselves are cautioned not to show partiality in judging, and in Surah An-Nisa of the Qur'an, we learn to fight against oppression or seek asylum elsewhere. We can not allow a concerted hate policy to become law in the state of North Dakota as it would be unjust and un-American. As a chaplain residing in North Dakota, I value our state's longstanding commitment to justice and equal treatment for all under the law. I implore you to uphold those principles by not proceeding in favor of this policy against transgender high school/college student-athletes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Miller".

Chpln. (Gen) Sarah Miller, MDiv, BCC | Badge# 16110
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