

16 March 2021

Markita Rohde

Mother

1217 Cottagewood Ln NW #3

Mandan, ND 58554

North Dakota Legislative Assembly

State Capital

600 East Boulevard

Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear North Dakota Legislative Assembly:

I am the mother of a beautiful child. He is funny, smart, goofy and full of love. He is just like your child. I love him just like you love yours. However, maybe unlike your child, my child is transgender. My child, just like your child, has an innate need to belong. Like your child, he needs to feel included. The passage of this legislation ensures that my child belongs nowhere. It ensures that he cannot benefit from all the wonderful things that team sports provide. It ensures that he cannot play on a team that affirms his identity, name, and pronouns.

The lack of access to affirming spaces and a community that supports transgender youth by affirming their gender identity, name, and pronoun has specifically been tied to increased suicidality and decreased mental well-being among transgender youth. For example, in The Trevor Project's 2020 mental health survey, transgender and nonbinary youth who reported that no one in their lives affirmed or respected their pronouns were twice as likely to have attempted suicide in the past year as transgender youth whose pronouns were affirmed by all or most people they knew—28 percent versus 12 percent.

Given the well-documented benefits of sports—and disproportionate mental health struggles among transgender youth—transgender sports bans can have disastrous consequences, particularly as they continue to perpetuate and legitimize rejection of gender identity. While inclusion in sports is not a cure-all for the deep-seated discrimination against transgender youth, their exclusion from such activities can potentially put their lives at risk.

My son just wants to belong. He wants to be included.

Sincerely,

Markita Rohde