January 23, 2023

Opposition to House Bill 1297

Dear House Members, My testimony is in opposition to HB 1297. I urge you to give this bill a **DO NOT PASS**.

Gender dysphoria (previously gender identity disorder), according to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders are defined as a "marked incongruence between their experienced or expressed gender and the one they were assigned at birth." People who experience this turmoil cannot correlate to their gender expression when identifying themselves within the traditional, rigid societal binary male or female roles, which may cause cultural stigmatization. This can further result in relationship difficulties with family, peers, friends and lead to interpersonal conflicts, rejection from society, symptoms of depression and anxiety, substance use disorders, a negative sense of well-being and poor self-esteem, and an increased risk of self-harm and suicidality. Patients with this condition should be provided with psychiatric support. Hormonal therapy and surgical therapy are also available depending on the individual case and patient needs. (Garg G, Elshimy G, Marwaha R. Gender Dysphoria. [Updated 2022 Oct 16]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2022 Jan.)

Transgender people (including non-binary and third gender individuals) have existed in cultures worldwide since ancient times. The modern terms and meanings of “transgender”, “gender”, “gender identity”, and “gender role” only emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Many people in western societies, particularly the United States, have been unaware or ignorant of the existence of people we call transgender today. **Western societies have had an unfortunate history of dismissing or persecuting groups of people who were outside what the majority of the population considered “normal”.**

I cannot understand how so many people in this state fail to take the time to understand transgender people or the LGBT community as a whole. The disturbing rhetoric, largely rooted both in bigotry and ignorance, that I hear on an almost daily basis make me sick to my stomach. Homosexuality was considered a mental disorder for decades by the western medical community. Homosexuals are still are executed in many parts of the world today. Homosexuality is no longer considered a mental disorder because it is not a mental disorder. It is a natural variation of human sexuality. The fight for the rights of transgender people today is no different than the gay liberation movement of the late 1960s through the mid 1980s. Transgender people are not going away and deserve to be fully embraced by our society. The confused, hurtful, vile and dehumanizing language that a concerning amount of people use, particularly when discussing transgender members of our community, is absolutely disgusting and needs to stop. Trans people should not be referred to with language such as: anomalies, exceptions, deformities, mentally ill, etc. Similar language has been used throughout history to ostracize groups of people who are different from the majority of the population in an attempt to dismiss them as freaks and perverts for simply trying to exist in the world. **Trans people are not a threat to society.**

People need to understand that being transgender, albeit rare, is also a natural variation among humans. Transgender people deserve respect and access to healthcare just like everyone else. I frequently hear unkind language used by my fellow North Dakotan’s regarding trans people, gay people, lesbians, etc. The recent rise in, what I call, anti-trans-panic is largely driven by political right-wing media outlets such as FOX News; far-right outlets such as Newsmax and One America News Network; and other outright hateful organizations such as The Daily Wire (founded in 2015 by religious fundamentalists Ben Shapiro and Jeremy Boreing). The latter organization recently produced a disgusting, misinformed, hateful, and dishonest film titled “What is a Woman”. Anyone who has had any exposure to this film should have been able to easily recognize the intentionally dishonest jump-cut editing tactics and the film’s overtly cartoonish condescending tone. It was

one of the worst pieces of “journalism” ever produced in the modern era. Anyone with a basic level of critical thinking and media literacy would have been able to identify this film for what it was. Unfortunately, too many people are unwilling to think critically and question any of their preconceived notions of what people are, how people interact in society or how the world actually works. **The existence of transgender people is not a political issue. It is a medical and human rights issue**.

I have heard many people express concerns about irreversible side effects about medical treatments for transgender youth. What people are ignoring is the extensive diagnostic testing and specialized counseling that occurs when determining whether or not a child is transgender in the first place. Children who are suspected of being transgender begin by transitioning socially. This can include letting the child wear clothes typical of the opposite gender, referring to the child by their preferred pronouns, referring to them a different name, etc. Children during this stage of “social transition” are monitored closely by their family, community and their health care specialist. These children are not coerced in any way to maintain their behavior. Evaluation continues until the child reaches a particular stage of puberty and at that time medical intervention can become necessary. The effect of puberty blockers, within the first few years of taking the medication, is indeed reversible and would be stopped if there was evidence that is in the best interest of the child to continue through the puberty that aligned with their assigned gender (sex) at birth. If this is not the case then the child could proceed with further medical intervention which would allow their body to develop in a manner consistent with their gender identity. By contrast, allowing a transgender child to physically develop in a manner consistent with their assigned gender (sex) would indeed cause many irreversible physical characteristics. In adulthood, a transgender person, whose body was developed by their natural puberty, could have a very difficult time transitioning into a body consistent their preferred gender identity. Certain characteristics such as their voice, bone structure, etc., can make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to blend into society and live as the gender they identify as. **The diagnostic and treatment processes need to be left to medical professionals.**

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people from the ages of ten to twenty-four. Lots of young people think about it. LGBT people, in that age group, are almost five times as likely to have attempted suicide than their heterosexual peers. What is worse is that LGBT youth who report coming from non-accepting and non-supporting families are eight times more likely than the other LGBT youth to have attempted suicide. So, we’re talking about people who are eight times more likely than the people who are already five times more likely than the rest of the population in that age range who may attempt to kill themselves. This is exacerbated even further by people on TV who attribute the suicidal ideation of LGBT people to a mental disorder that these children, and young adults, don’t even have. Everyone in this country deserves access to healthcare. Transgender youth and adults are no exception. HB 1301 seeks to further reduce the limited Healthcare that American’s have access to in the first place. Decisions concerning the health of all American’s need to be kept between the patients, their loved ones and their doctors. **The government has no business intervening in the medical care that people receive from their doctors and any attempt to do so is a massive authoritarian overreach of the government**. Medical care needs to be handled by medical experts who are trained to follow the scientific evidence wherever it leads.

Please be kind, open minded and understand that the children being targeted by this bill do not need your help. They are already loved and in good hands. There is no need to intervene in their medical care. This bill will cause far more pain and suffering in the lives of people who don’t deserve it.

I strongly urge you to oppose HB 1297.

Shawn Nixon