

Dear Chair Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee,

My testimony is in opposition to House Bill 1297. I ask that you give this bill a Do Not Pass.

The first week of kindergarten my kid did not eat lunch. The other students split by gender when deciding where to eat lunch and my kid, who was marked "female" at birth did not feel female. More than that, they knew they aren't female. Literally at 5 years old my kid knew they were different and it made them unable to eat because the world did not acknowledge the possibility of this difference. As early as preschool a teacher noticed that my child's interests could not be classified by the typical binary gender. When we define everything by binary gender assigned at birth, before we know chromosomes, hormone levels, or the way the brain is developed, we mis-assign gender markers a certain percentage of the time.

When scientists look at the brains of transgender people they are different than the brains of others assigned the same gender at birth. "In studies that use MRIs to take images of the brain as people perform tasks, the brain activity of transgender people tends to look like that of the gender they identify with." [clevelandclinic.org] Gender is not the same as your genitalia. Just like a parent with brown eyes and one with blue eyes can have a green eyed child, gender is more complex than we have thought. It is not one or the other and not decided solely by external genitalia.

My child felt like an outcast because our school system is so gendered. There was no third category in which their "I'm not either of these two options" self could fit. Have you ever been somewhere that just didn't fit for you? What if you were required to be in that place for 12 years? And then, when you were finally old enough to get out, to move away, you found you were unable to get the piece of paper changed that originally slotted you into the category that didn't fit? The North Dakota legislature is doing its honest best to chase transgender people out of the state. If you succeed, this bill will chase after them. This bill will make this feeling of being a misfit travel, even to places where they can find acceptance. It is nothing short of cruel.

Please do not pass.

Thank you for your consideration

Rev. Michelle Webber