

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

My testimony is in opposition to House Bill 1403. I ask that you give this bill a Do Not Pass.

I'm a suicide prevention advocate that works primarily within North Dakota. I serve as the expert on LGBTQ+ data and outcomes. We have already had several bills proposed this legislative session that seek to empower parents with fundamental parental rights over all aspects of their child's life.

While I have not had time to keep up with the entirety of testimony being heard, I did manage to hear Samantha Field's testimony. She was representing the Coalition for Responsible Home Education and talked about the potential harm that becomes possible when parents have near absolute authority over their children.

She speaks about not being given a basic education or progressing past the eighth grade reading level. She speaks about the harm of fundamental rights being given to parents, because it makes the fundamental rights of youth virtually meaningless.

Senator Janne Myrdal, during hearing of Senate Bill 2231, suggested that many parents don't believe that being transgender is immutable. She went on to say that it was likened to anorexia and the goal should be to not continue in that direction. Meaning that one should help a youth with anorexia better manage food and nutrition or a youth with gender dysphoria should be made to get more comfortable with their physical anatomy.

Sen Myrdal said she does not agree with the science presented and I think many parents believe the same things she believes. I think many parents reject the science and best practices of our major medical organizations. And I believe we have clear evidence of the harm this has on youth when looking at it from a medical lens. The question becomes do parents have the right to harm their youth, based on personal belief?

While public perception is certainly geared towards being skeptical against transgender medicine, it is established, researched, practiced, and supported medicine. Allowing individuals to go against it from a medical framework is not different from allowing parents to use leeches as a cure for anything really.

And while arguing against trans medicine may seem reasonable or legislation that chills intervention for trans youth may seem palpable. The kind of power we need to instill in the individual to override medical authority on best practices is extremely far reaching. At what point do we allow a family to take a child home after they've been hit by a car and pray the injury away? And fear not, this family has sincere beliefs that praying will work. In the same way Sen Myrdal has sincere beliefs trans youth don't benefit from trans medicine.

I believe parents serve their youth best when they serve as advocates. I see parents excelling when they listen to their youth, encourage them, love them, give them opportunities to explore

and excel in all aspects of life. I've heard from parents and leaders of our healthcare and education institutes and I feel within North Dakota, parents do have great authority over being advocates for their youth.

I've heard of all of these institutes respecting and attempting to work with parents in every way possible while limiting the capacity for some parents to be neglectful or harmful. When I read HB 1403, I read it in the context of its capacity to do harm. I read it within its capacity to empower parents to be more abusive and have less oversight.

As I've said in previous testimony to these bills, I would implore great caution when attempting to expand these rights and in understanding the way they chill and serve to prevent protection to youth. I have already seen testimony from a director of the human service zones asking for clarifications on these bills and how some of them proposed would interfere with the capacity to help youth.

Does a parent have a right to determine their youth's gender identity? Do they have the right to refuse vaccinations? Do they have the right to refuse education, therapy, or diabetes medication? Do they have the right to starve their kid, if they think their kid is too fat? The right to lock their kid in the room the entire weekend? Let's ask these questions while considering the language within this bill:

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a governmental entity may not interfere with the fundamental right of a parent to direct the upbringing, education, health care, and mental health of the parent's child, unless the governmental entity demonstrates the interference

I will let other people speak to the policy considerations of this bill. What I worry about is youth and the youth who can't advocate for themselves. Who find themselves in homes that are not safe, with parents who do not care about them, and where they can't find help. I've seen kids in pain. I've seen kids feel hopeless. I've seen kids abandoned by the people who were supposed to love them. I've seen parents tell their own kid they don't want them anymore. That they don't love them.

And when a parent does not love their kid and has total control of their kid's upbringing, education, health care, and mental health - that is a scary situation. I see parents looking at legislation like this and thinking it will make them the absolute authority of their household. The king or queen of their kid's life. You don't need therapy kid, HB 1403 says I get to say what your mental health is.

And I see kids running away from these homes. I see kids turning to self harm. I see kids that become anxious and depressed or suicidal in these homes. Even though this law would potentially allow parents of trans youth protection against legal discrimination within the state while pursuing healthcare, the ability of this bill to empower abusive parents is far too broad.

According to the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), about 1.5% of our total youth are in homes where their parents are often violent to each other. 46% of total high school youth reported their parents or other adults in their home swore at them, insulted them, or put them down one or more times in the last twelve months before the survey. These numbers are higher for queer youth.

It is for these reasons I strongly urge you to consider voting Do Not Pass. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state.

Best regards,  
Faye Seidler