

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

My testimony is in opposition to House Bill 1522. I ask that you give this bill a Do Not Pass.

I am the parent of a nonbinary adult child and the pastor to a congregation comprised of individuals across the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity. Like many people, I have had to educate myself over the years to understand the wide expressions of humanity in our world. I have come to a place in my life where I do my utmost to accept the person in front of me as they express themselves, knowing that they are precious in God's sight. My call is to love every one of my neighbors as God loves each of us.

The most important thing I have learned is that each person I encounter has the inherent right to be known for who they are. The ability to be seen and offered dignity is essential to the well-being of everyone.

Unfortunately, we have attempted to erase those who do not conform to a way of being that we are not accustomed to. Our reluctance to address people by their chosen names and the pronouns that reflect their internal identities has put members of the LGBTQ community at risk for substance abuse, suicide, and violence against their persons.

As adults need to be treated with the dignity of acceptance and visibility, so do children and youth. Insisting that schools, private and public, call children by a name and gender that does not reflect their reality is telling that young person that they do not matter. That is criminal. Therefore, it is wrong to make that an offense at school.

Within this bill is an unnecessary measure that states that no accommodations are to be made for persons who identify themselves as animals. That is simply pandering to an urban legend that has no basis in fact. It is a solution in search of a problem.

Finally, there is a serious flaw in this legislation. It is the provision that allows for civil action against a school if using appropriate pronouns and chosen names causes harm to a student. There is no harm to another individual for respecting another person. Rather, this provision encourages others to force their individual beliefs on other people. This is constitutionally wrong.

Such overreaching by the legislature serves only to divide us more. In a time when we should seek to hold true to the God-given right of all people to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Please recognize the sacred worth of all North Dakotans and recommend a Do Not Pass on House Bill 1522.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state

Best regards,

Rev. Grace Morton