

January 24, 2023

Dear Chair Weisz and Members of the House Human Services Committee:

My name is Rev. Karen Van Fossan. I am an ordained minister and licensed professional counselor, serving as a pastoral counselor in the state of North Dakota. **I ask that you give HB 1522 a Do Not Pass recommendation.**

A few years ago, I was adopted by a young mother and her beautiful transgender child. Having been rejected by their family of origin, they asked me to become their mom and grandma. Due to a fundamental misunderstanding about what it means to be transgender, their family had become unable to love them. As painful as this breach has been for my chosen daughter and grandchild, I believe the real losers in this scenario are the family members who don't get to experience the Halloween costumes, the spontaneous dances, and the joyful utterances (like "I love you, Grandma!") that I now enjoy as a matter of course. I do indeed love my transgender grandchild from the deepest place in my soul.

Still, my grandbaby is just one of the reasons I strongly oppose HB 1522. As a pastor and as a counselor, I am honored to have accompanied a number of trans youth, as they have made life-giving transitions from a prescribed gender identity to an authentic gender identity. It has been my distinct privilege to witness their unfolding, their blossoming, as they see their own sacredness in the eyes of God – and, at last, in the eyes of themselves.

In fact, according to a recent position statement, the American Counseling Association says this about gender identity and ethical counselor conduct:

"Gender is the product of a complicated interaction of chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, and culture that begins before birth. Most people's gender identity is consistent with the gender they were labeled at birth. Individuals who identify as transgender have a persistent and consistent experience of their gender being different from their sex assigned at birth. The stress brought on by stigma and the pressure to be gender-conforming with an individual's assigned sex is known to cause minority stress and significantly affect health and wellbeing, even in the face of the resiliency and the strengths of transgender individuals. Counselors know and understand the critical importance of living consistently with one's gender identity, which may or may not include physical or social gender transition."

I would like to repeat a portion of that last statement: "Counselors know and understand the critical importance of living consistently with one's gender identity."

In other words, **the expectations of this bill are in direct conflict with best practices for counselors who serve trans children** – and, I would say, for any adults who serve any children. The more whole any child, any person, can be, the more whole the community becomes.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to vote Do Not Pass on HB 1522. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be glad to respond to any questions.

Sincerely,
Rev. Karen Van Fossan, M.Div., LPC