

House Human Services

SB 2260

Wednesday, March 22nd, 2023

IN OPPOSITION

Committee Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Audin Rhodes (legally Allison Joyce Rhodes) and I am writing in opposition to SB 2260.

I am a concerned civilian who was born and raised in North Dakota. I am a family services case manager at a statewide organization partnered with North Dakota Health and Human Services that helps lower income people receive services to better their lives and families. I am here of my own volition due to the extremely personal stake I have in this legislature. I grew up in the small town of Velva, ND and am now living in Minot, ND. For nearly 30 years I've been here and for well over half my life I've known I was queer.

One of my best friends nearly killed himself when he was an adolescent youth because his family did not accept his queerness and because he thought he would never be able to live and be loved as a man. I'm so thankful he lived beyond that day. Many queer kids aren't so lucky however. Half of all transgender and nonbinary youths have seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. And at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds. These are our children. By and large, the research has shown that supporting LGBTQIA+ youth is what leads to happy, well-rounded adults. Trying to change them or rejecting them for who they are leads to despair, hopelessness, self-harm, and sometimes death. The following was taken from the Human Rights Campaign:

“So-called “conversion therapy,” sometimes known as “reparative therapy,” is a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Such practices have been rejected by every mainstream medical and mental health organization for decades, but due to continuing discrimination and societal bias against LGBTQ people, some practitioners continue to conduct conversion therapy. Minors are especially vulnerable, and conversion therapy can lead to depression, anxiety, drug use, homelessness, and suicide.

To date, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico all have laws or regulations protecting youth from this harmful practice. Eight of these state laws or regulations were enacted under Republican governors. A growing number of municipalities have also enacted similar protections, including at least 70 cities and counties in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington and Wisconsin.” (hrc.org)

Imagine you were told that you weren't who you know yourself to be. Imagine you were told that your gender identity is an illness and that your sexuality is wrong. You'd be forced to live a life that is not true to who you are. You'd have to cut parts of yourself off, and that is an act that leads

to death, a bleeding out of someone's soul if you would. And I don't think any of us wants to lead children to death or harm. We can at the very least agree on that. We have a responsibility to protect our trans, non-binary, gay, lesbian, gender non-conforming, queer children. We have a responsibility to acknowledge their identities and save them from the painful abuse of conversion practices.

Kids deserve to be accepted for who they are and for who they are becoming. They deserve to explore their gender and sexuality. They deserve to explore their values. They deserve a future.

There is no harm in allowing kids to live life as their most authentic selves. It is a beautiful thing to watch a child grow into their confidence and identity. It costs you nothing to be kind to them as they navigate who they are. It costs you nothing to love the uniqueness of our gender-queer children. That is why I am in strong opposition of SB 2260.

Thank you for reading my testimony. Your consideration of my perspective and the other perspectives of the trans, queer, gender expansive and gender non-conforming LGBTQIA+ community is very much appreciated.

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