

Dear Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My testimony is in opposition to House Bill 1488. I ask that you give this bill a Do Not Pass.

I begin with curiosity as to why this is an urgent issue now in North Dakota. I was born and raised in North Dakota and joined a whole variety of school clubs as I explored interests, followed passions, and sought out community and friendships. Given the slate of other bills in our legislature, it would seem that this bill is directed toward GSAs or other LGBTQIA+ groups for students.

Statistics show that thoughts of self-harm and actions of self-harm are high among our youth in North Dakota and even higher among LGBTQIA+ youth specifically. We also know that having one supportive adult reduces that likelihood by a large margin. As does having a safe and supportive space to go. That is the intention of GSAs and similar groups- to provide a safe and supportive place. For many youth, they are not out to their parents and this bill would force them to come out before they are ready. Or they may have unsupportive parents & permission would be unlikely- if they even ask. Requiring permission could likely remove a club like this as a supportive space for a LGBT youth. This bill would cause further harm on a youth who already feel unsupported and vulnerable.

As an aunt to four young kids living in ND, I want them to grow up feeling supported and to have access to resources that help them belong and feel safe. Intentionally passing bills targeting LGBTQIA youth does not promote a culture of safety and diversity.

As a faith leader, I am called to be concerned for the welfare of all people, with particular attention to the vulnerable and marginalized. LGBTQ youth need our support and need places to feel safe. Please vote do not pass for the sake of the harm this will do to our youth and schools.

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