

## Testimony Against Bill 1254

My name is Zeke Langemo, I am sixteen years old, and I am a senior at Sheyenne High School in Fargo, North Dakota. I am an honors student and throughout my high school career I've maintained a 4.0 GPA and in addition, I've participated and excelled in choir and musical theatre. Next year, I plan to attend Concordia College where I will double major in Data Analytics and Mathematics. Overall, I am a normal teenage boy trying to enjoy my last year of high school.

However, I find myself feeling extremely threatened by the amount of anti-trans and anti-LGBT+ legislation that is being pushed this legislative session. I am assigned female at birth and I have identified as a transgender man for many years now. Because I have received support and care throughout my transition process, I am now able to live a happy, healthy, and fruitful life. Although I do not want to discredit the work I've put in to bettering myself, I know it is majorly because of gender affirming care that I am as happy as I am today. The thought of losing this happiness, and my right to living out my teenage years as my cisgender peers would, I am concerned about how Bill 1254 will affect not only me, but my transgender peers.

To begin, I would like to share my personal story and experience with gender affirming care. I began to question my gender in eighth grade, though I have always vaguely felt a disconnect between my body and mind. Before I transitioned, I can confidently say I was in the worst mindset of my life. I severely struggled with anxiety, depression, self esteem and body image issues, gender dysphoria, and self harm. By my ninth grade year, I was aware of my identity but terrified to transition and be my authentic self due to a fear of how my peers and family would react, and how I would be treated in a state that has not been kind to my people. I would eventually attempt suicide because I no longer wanted to live as a female. I was entirely trapped in the wrong body; and could think of no other solutions.

Nevertheless, I learned from this experience and began socially transitioning before my sophomore year of high school. Going on HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) has improved my mental health and social life significantly. Being able to live as a man has permitted me the opportunity to grow in various areas of my life where I previously struggled due to my unstable mental state.

Transitioning has allowed me to become a thriving member of our community. Even so, I'm not where I need to be yet. Binding my breasts on a daily basis has begun to cause me chest pain, and not binding makes me

uncomfortable and restricts my clothing options. I am frequently in changing rooms for both gym and musical theatre and am forced to be in a state of discomfort, and possibly out myself to my classmates. I want to get top surgery so I can reach my greatest potential in school, work, and life. I desire to enter locker rooms and swimming pools without facing, at the very least, an uncomfortable situation, or at the worst- a dangerous encounter. I planned to get top surgery before I began college in the fall to avoid situations that will cause me fear due to my gender identity. I want my years living in the dorms to be both exciting and memorable, and I feel that is not possible without this surgery. If I could not receive it, I would likely live at home, which is not the college experience I wish to receive.

From the first time I was alerted of Bill 1254, one question stuck with me. Why should legislators, many of whom are likely uninformed about the transgender population, be able to override the decisions that myself, my family and medical providers have decided are best for me? Why should you have a place in my home and my family when you are oblivious to my personal situation?

My parents, doctors, and therapists have helped me immensely throughout my transition. It has not been an easy process to get where I am today. Additionally, gaining access to gender affirming surgery is extraordinarily difficult. It has taken a considerable amount of time and resources for me to even receive a consultation. The American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association both support care for trans youth- If the professionals in my life, and throughout the United States, say this is the best move for my wellbeing, why is the government allowed to intervene?

Many of you are religious, and I would like to mention that I am as well. Furthermore, Concordia, my school of choice, is a Lutheran establishment. Concordia has expressed their displeasement with the anti-trans legislation present in the North Dakota House of Representatives. This demonstrates how religion is not an excuse to erase the rights of the transgender population.

For those who I may reach by discussing the impacts this bill will have on our economy; passing bill 1254, and others like it, demonstrates how North Dakota is not an LGBT+ friendly state. This will discourage many citizens from moving here who may have been taking it into consideration. Even heterosexual, cisgender allies will be deterred from taking up residence in ND. You will lose business due to this decision. Businesses will move to Moorhead where they are allowed to be LGBT+ friendly. You will also lose young people potentially looking to enter the workforce in North Dakota. I believe I would be a valuable asset to a

team in the future. I will be pursuing work as a data analyst and would have loved to work in North Dakota- only now, I feel unsafe, and I know many of my peers, regardless of their identity, feel the same.

Finally, I would like to note how gender affirming care saves lives. Going on testosterone saved me from another suicide attempt. I would like to say my situation is unique, but unfortunately, it is not. I am one of many transgender teens who've contemplated or attempted suicide. Transgender suicide rates are alarmingly high and they will continue to rise if we prohibit life saving care. In comparison, the detransition rate is 1%. It is rare to detransition, but it is not rare for transgender youth to commit suicide. The question begs: why are we so concerned with the mistakes of detransitioners when trans youth are dying or being put into severe distress due to this legislation?

In conclusion, gender affirming care has made the lives of trans teens, including myself, significantly better. Passing this bill is not only affecting the trans population, it is ensuring harm to our economy and a rise in the suicide rate. As representatives of our state, you cannot in good conscience use your voice to pass this bill. Preventing gender affirming care only serves to cause harm to a population that is already suffering.