Senate Human Services Committee
HB 1297 – March 20, 2023
Testimony of Rachel Sinness, P&A Legal Director

P&A protects the human, civil and legal rights of people with disabilities. The agency's programs and services seek to make positive changes for people with disabilities where we live, learn, work and play.

Our advocates and attorneys assist not only individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, but also those with mental health disabilities. This is where we see an intersectionality between gender identity and mental health. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to have a mental health disability than the general population. Studies routinely show that more than a third of LGBTQ+ individuals, and nearly 40% of trans individuals, report having at least one more or disability. Forty percent of trans individuals also reported having attempted suicide at some point in their lives. As shown by these statistics, disability issues disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ individuals.

Young people experience an even greater impact. Fifty-three percent of individuals aged eighteen to twenty-five years report serious psychological distress, and at least one quarter of LGBTQ+ youth report experiencing bullying at school because of an actual or perceived disability.

The prevalence of mental health disabilities in the LGBTQ+ community makes the community particularly vulnerable to proposals such as HB 1297, even if the proposal is well intentioned and purports to advance the rights of another class of individuals. As Audrey Lorde said, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, for we do not lead single-issue lives."

For these reasons, P&A urges a DO NOT PASS on HB 1297.