Senate Human Services

HB 1474

Tuesday, March 21st, 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 HB 1474.

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.

Growing up in North Dakota did not allow me to easily find the language I needed to express and define myself. Even so, I knew I was different in a queer and gender non-conforming way. I did not meet an openly trans person until I was in my early 20s and meeting them changed my life. Seeing them live their truth opened my future up to one of joy, clarity, and acceptance instead of denial, confusion, and apathy. Coming into my trans identity feels like coming home. It feels right. And I would like the opportunity to make it right and true in as many ways legally available. I am working to legally change my name to a name more affirming than the one given to me at birth. And after I give birth to a child of my own, my intention is to go on hormone replacement therapy and get top surgery to better reflect my inner self even further. Just because I have a uterus, does not make me a woman. And just because I will be the one giving birth to my partner and I's child, does not make me a mother. I will be a nonbinary parent and my child will understand that.

Your refusal to see me does not mean I am not here. And by removing gender variant and gender expansive options from statistical data collection, you are lying to the rest of the public. And even more atrocious, you are refusing to acknowledge that I ***am*** a part of this state's population. That I ***am*** a person who lives and works and votes and breathes in North Dakota. The fact is, whether you like it or not/understand it or not, I am here. *We* are here. If you truly want to support and serve the people in your state, then that means serving the trans community that exists here as well. It means educating yourselves on what it means to be trans and on what it means to be gender non-conforming, and non-binary. It means having empathy for a community that has faced unwarranted prejudice and hate born from ignorance. Erasing us from statistical data collection is a cheap way to remove yourselves from the very real violence and discrimination that trans and non-binary people face. You will be creating false data via omission, and I think all North Dakotans deserve better than that. They deserve the truth and they deserve accurate representation of their state's data, and that means including data on the trans, non-binary, and intersex communities that exist here.

At the end of the day it comes down to a simple adage, "You don't have to understand someone to respect them." I am not asking you to understand my gender or relationship to gender or even

understand my gender expression. I am asking that you respect me as a human being who knows who they are, just as much as you know who you are. I am asking that you do not erase us but that you embrace us. Acknowledge us. Accept us. We are your siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, children. We are people who are exploring our gender and realizing our gender assigned at birth never properly fit. We are people who have always known but who are hiding in the closet because we're so terrified of being disowned by family members. We are people locking away our authentic selves because we are frightened of being targeted by anti-trans legislation such as this. We are people who serve our communities. We are local artists, small business owners, veterans, students, parents, grandparents, leaders, performers, social workers, teachers. We are here in North Dakota and we deserve to be acknowledged, not erased. This is our home too and always has been.

My best friend is a trans man living in Wisconsin. For strangers meeting him, they would have no idea he was born with a female body. He has a flat chest, a thick beard, brawny shoulders, and a low timbre of a voice. I am so elated that he was able to change his gender on his birth certificate to male and likewise change his driver's license and other legal documents. That opportunity to have such a wholistic synchronicity with oneself in all spheres of life is truly wonderful. My friend's joy is human and beautiful. I hope that my home state will offer me and others like me the same opportunity for gender affirming legal changes as well as statistical representation. These changes will keep us safe and will make us feel seen and celebrated. We deserve that. We deserve to see our community represented. And all North Dakotans deserve to see their states' peoples accurately represented, aka honesty.

There is no harm in allowing people to live life as their most authentic selves. It costs you nothing to be kind to us. It costs you nothing to see our shared humanity. That is why I am in strong opposition of HB 1474.

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

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