

Senate Judiciary

HB 1522

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 1522.

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.

I am trans non-binary and growing up in rural North Dakota did not allow me the vocabulary to define and express myself. I knew I was kind of a boy and kind of a girl but had no representation to look up to, no role models, no GSA. No safe havens. So I remained closeted for a very long time and am only recently out to most of my family and my workplace.

Because of my personal gender fluid identity, I was able to use the girls bathroom without much thought. It personally didn't feel fully right, but it didn't feel fully wrong either. Some of my friends did not have that luxury. They felt fully wrong and coerced, every time they had to use a bathroom that didn't align with their gender identity. They felt cut every time they were called a name or pronoun that did not reflect who they understood themselves to be. 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.

I want those of you in this room with children, to imagine them being in a school that did not or does not see them and in fact deliberately harms them. If your child is an adult I want you to go back to when they were a teen. Picture their face. Their style choices. Their likes and dislikes. I want you to imagine your masculine son being called "she" or "her" by peers and adults and being forced to use the girls bathroom and being excluded from sports like football. I want you to imagine your daughter being called a boy and being made fun of for liking feminine things or wearing a sparkly dress to prom even though they are in fact a girl. Picture her being forced to use the boys bathroom when all she wants is to be treated like the other girls in her class. Can you imagine how distressing this would be for your child? How much mental anguish this disrespect and invisibility would cause? As if being a youth finding your way in a complicated world isn't painful enough?

And if that's too hard to visualize, can you imagine if someone called you the wrong pronouns and the wrong name every day, all day? What if I called councilman _____, Tiffany, and called her a

woman? That would be upsetting to you, wouldn't it? You would correct me and say, "My name is actually _____. And I'm a man." If I and the rest of the world kept ignoring you and told you "No actually, you're a woman, your name is Tiffany, and you need to use the women's restroom...Don't you think it would take it's toll after a while? After a few months? And then years? 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. And I don't think anyone in this room wants to lead children to death or harm. We can at the very least agree on that.

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 HB 1522.

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

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