

Dear Senate Human Services Committee,

Your dedication to protecting our youth is admirable, but I'm speaking to you today to share some concerns about how bills such as HB1522 may actually do the opposite and be harmful to youth of North Dakota.

Supporters of bills such as HB1522 have repeatedly said that they intend to "protect" youth. However, none of these supporters have yet answered concerns about the unintended consequences of bills like this.

Additionally, no one has discussed the harmful effects lack of information and a feeling of being unwelcome has on youth. A 2011 study noted that adolescents who identify as a sexual minority (i.e., gay/lesbian, bisexual, or other sexual orientation) were twice as likely to perform acts of self-harm. A study ten years later further noted the association between the experience of being identified as a sexual minority and the increased risk of self-harm.

Aside from self-harm, lack of representation in one's community leads to dehumanization of a person according to 2020 research by Mancini T. Ferrari. This dehumanization further contributes to the mental health decline in youth. An article published in 2022 surmised that making sure people from diverse backgrounds are represented in mental health education resources "is an important component to inclusive accessible care."

In the landmark 2018 case *Doe ex rel. Doe v. Boyertown Area School District*, testimony relied on the American Academy of Pediatrics' amicus brief reporting that "policies that exclude transgender individuals exacerbate the individual's risk of anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, engaging in self-injurious behaviors, suicide, and other adverse outcomes."

A consultant with Fargo's Harbor Health Initiative explained that bills like HB1522 are not operating in the best interest of people, but rather creating anxiety and fear. They said: "since these actions aren't well grounded, they're not going to result in better outcomes. Which means more destabilizations and more anxiety and fear from it.."

A primary goal of Harbor Health is to promote better mental health, and HB1522 and other anti-trans bills do not support this goal. "You don't ever want a person thinking there is no option or place for themselves." This person went on to say: "When we're looking at minority communities, a big thing for them is finding representation, because it can be extremely socially isolating to not see yourself represented in materials or stories. There are a lot of other factors to consider too when we think about shame and the narratives youth may have about themselves, their bodies, and even their desires when they're living in a society that actively stigmatizes them."

Please, for the sake of ND youth, vote Do Not Pass on HB1522.

Thank you,
Janet B Anderson
Burlington, ND

Resources

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O'Reilly LM, Pettersson E, Donahue K, et al. Sexual orientation and adolescent suicide attempt and self-harm: a co-twin control study. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*. 2021;62(7):834-841. doi:10.1111/jcpp.13325

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