

Dear ND Legislators,

My name is Ashley Limesand, LPC (MN), LAPC (ND), NCC and I work as a clinical mental health counselor serving ages 8+ in the state of North Dakota and Minnesota. I write this letter on behalf of myself, in an attempt to express how this bill would impact my work and my client's lives.

A vital and necessary piece of my work includes being able to discuss challenges people face in their lives in order to begin the work of normalizing individual differences that come with being a human so we can work to reduce barriers and cope with such challenges. Stated within the *American Counseling Association Code of Ethics* section A.1. "the primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients." This includes honoring and respecting the diversity of clients as they are, and not letting my own values, attitudes and beliefs, impact services or the client in a negative way (A.4.b). This same ethical code also asks me to advocate for clients at "individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to address potential barriers and obstacles that inhibit access and/or the growth and development of clients (*ACA Code of Ethics*, Section A.7.a)."

This bill directly challenges my ability to do my job and directly challenges standards set out in the counseling code of ethics that guide counselors in the field nationally. It imposes personal beliefs, values, and attitudes on clients unethically, putting me and many other professionals in a position to cause harm by not being able to honor clients' expressed identities, and furthermore puts me in a position to have to choose between the law, the ethical code, my client's wellbeing, and my own wellbeing.

Furthermore, it puts citizens of your state who need to utilize state funded resources in order to access therapy in potential harm emotionally on several fronts. It creates fear about one's ability to express themselves, which in turn increases emotional distress, worsening one's overall mental health. This creates even more barriers to treating the underlying issues that bring a person to therapy. Let me be clear here, a person's gender, gender identity, and gender expression are not the therapeutic issue being treated. They are a part of the whole person, and fear related to expressing this creates barriers to treating the actual issues people are struggling with.

I can also safely assume subjecting people to DNA tests that are most definitely going to be unwanted, creates a significant potential for traumatic experiences. All of these consequences, and likely many more not addressed specifically in this letter, would create significant barriers and obstacles for clients, greatly inhibiting their ability to access services that support their growth and development as individuals and in relation to their mental health, and would limit my ability to do my job effectively putting me in direct conflict with my ethical code and the best interests of my clients.

Outside of all of these very valid professional reasons that do not support this bill, and outside of one's right to basic human rights to not be discriminated against and to have access to

equality both of which this bill would challenge--I also would like to ask the below questions as a human and lifelong resident of this state. What would be the financial impact of running the DNA tests? How would you go about making someone undergo a DNA test? How does this support the emotional well-being of this state's citizens, both those who need services and those who have dedicated their lives to helping and supporting the well-being of others? How will this criminalize people who need services and those who provide it? What would the cost of this be to the state and its citizens? If people continue to experience more and more barriers to getting treatment for their mental health, people's overall well-being and functioning will suffer, and we can assume people will need more help and services, and need more support from the state. What is the overall financial impact of this to the state? Of continuing to ignore the mental health needs of your residents, focusing on the wrong details, and instead imposing your values and beliefs on citizens without understanding the larger impact?

Thank you for reading this letter. I urge you to please do better for your citizens no matter their gender identity or expression.

Sincerely,

Ashley Limesand, LPC (MN), LAPC (ND), NCC