Dear Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My testimony is in opposition to Senate Bill 2199. I ask that you give this bill a Do Not Pass.

The reason for this is that:

There is a lot that we do not know about the human body. There have been attempts to simplify this into a discussion of two genders. I may not be an expert on the science of chromosomes, genes, or genders. However, I am a mental health professional. Both my personal experience and the research that is available to those in my field indicate that attempting to dictate a person's gender based on limited physical characteristics is harmful.

In some cases, this kind of action can be deadly. In particular, we know that LGBTQ+ youth are already at a higher risk for suicidal ideation and attempts. We also know they experience anxiety and depression at higher rates. Research shows us that one supportive adult can reduce these risks by 40%. Specifically, this support from the adult is affirming the child's identity. The ND Youth Risk Behavior Survey does not paint an optimistic picture for many of our state's youth. The statistics among LGBTQ+ students are even more jarring. In a city (Grand Forks) that is already struggling to provide mental health care to children, this bill will increase the need significantly. There are no professional organizations supporting this action or this type of legislation. I understand people have concerns and questions. We have experts in our state who can help address these concerns. However, this legislation is not going to stop people from being transgender. It is only going to make their lives more difficult and make accessing needed care nearly impossible.

As a mental health professional, this bill would be asking me to practice against the standards of my profession. Conforming to this law could even put my licensure at risk. North Dakota is currently spending a large amount of money to attract professionals from all fields to our state. I fear that this bill sends a message that there are many smart, qualified, caring professionals who are not welcome. This is not limited only to transgender people. This will send a message to family, friends, and others who love someone who is trans. This bill is not good for our citizens, and it is not good for North Dakota.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state

Best regards,
Casey Berberich, LMSW, IBCLC