Olivia Data
Testimony on SB 2199
January 18, 2023

RE: Testimony in Opposition to SB 2199

Greetings, Chairwoman Larson and members of the committee. My name is Olivia Data, I'm a North Dakota resident and a freshman at Harvard College, and I ask you to vote "Do Not Pass" on SB 2199.

I am a cisgender woman. I am biologically female, and I identify as a woman. Still, my sex and my gender are two different things. Sex is biological and can be determined by DNA. Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct based on the characteristics a culture associates with men or women[1].

For me, the words I use to describe my gender just so happen to align with the sex I was assigned at birth. Yet, there are many people whose gender differs from their determined sex. By requiring that all gender-related words in the North Dakota Century Code refer to an individual's determined sex at birth, these people will be further marginalized.

As a woman, I am confident enough in my identity that I don't believe that another person's choice to describe themself with words that make them feel comfortable in their own skin poses a threat to my or anyone else's wellbeing. I do, however, know that if we refuse to allow people to express their identities or use the pronouns they identify with, we will be causing them harm.

[1] "Gender and health." *World Health Organization (WHO)*, https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1. Accessed 18 January 2023.

This is especially true for younger generations. Among LGBTQ+ youth, those whose pronouns are not respected by most of the people in their lives attempt suicide at almost twice the rate of those whose pronouns are respected[2].

I understand that there are many perspectives on transgender youth and the use of gender-inclusive language. Though I strongly believe in respecting others' identities and though I abhor the thought of further ostracizing an already vulnerable community, I do not wish to make this a debate about LGBTQ+ rights. Rather, I wish to say that allowing people to use words to describe their gender that may differ from their determined sex does no harm to anyone. Acknowledging a potential difference between gender and sex is not only harmless but scientifically correct. On the other hand, refusing to acknowledge this difference and requiring that words to describe gender must refer to a person's assigned sex as mandated in SB 2199 could cost lives.

Throughout my life, several of my friends and classmates have used pronouns other than he/him or she/her and have identified with a gender different than their sex determined at birth. Almost all of these people do not feel safe or respected in North Dakota. I was born and raised in this state. It is my home, and I love it. But I do not want to spend my life in a place that ostracizes the people I care about.

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[2] "Pronouns Usage Among LGBTQ Youth." *The Trevor Project*, 29 July 2020, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/pronouns-usage-among-lgbtq-youth/. Accessed 18 January 2023.

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Many people have grown disillusioned with North Dakota for this very reason. Rather than doubling down on the divisions between us, we ought to be striving to unite our state's communities. Please, for the sake of North Dakota's youth, for the future of this state, vote "Do Not Pass" on SB 2199.

Thank you for your time.

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