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NASW
National Association of Social Workers
NORTH DAKOTA CHAPTER

Chairperson Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kristin Rubbelke, and I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, North Dakota Chapter (NASW-ND). On behalf of NASW-ND, we ask that you oppose SB 2199 regarding gender usage in the North Dakota Century Code.

Practices that ignore sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression stand in direct conflict with the NASW's professional code of ethics and best practices, representing a significant risk of harm to individuals. Social workers have an ethical and professional duty to provide evidence-based care including but not limited to care provided on the basis of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics. This language would make it nearly impossible for social workers to work with trans or non-gender conforming individuals without causing harm.

NASW is acutely aware of the ways people who are LGBTQ+ experience discrimination when accessing housing, health care, employment, education, public assistance, and other social services. NASW asserts that discrimination and prejudice directed against individuals based on gender identity or gender expression, whether actual or perceived, are damaging to the social, emotional, psychological, physical, and economic well-being of the affected individuals, as well as society as a whole.

Williams Institute identifies that 20% people who identify as transgender are of youths ages 13-17, meaning this bill will significantly affect North Dakota children. Although most people's gender identity is congruent with their biological sex, some experience their gender identity to be discordant. All research illuminates how critical it is to affirm and support an individual's identified gender.

Notwithstanding the social discrimination suffered, LGBTQ+ individuals also experience a severe lack of competent health providers, including mental health and primary care. Positive experiences of social gender affirmation are critical to a person's health and well-being. Greater social gender affirmation is associated with improved mental health and well-being among diverse groups of transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

Despite increased public awareness, no individual or community faces more social judgment, stigma, verbal harassment, and physical violence than trans and gender expansive individuals. This often occurs in tandem with racial and ethnic discrimination, with data indicating that 82% of trans individuals have contemplated suicide and 40% have attempted suicide, with suicidality highest among trans youth. Additionally, one in five transgender people in the United States has experienced discrimination when seeking a home, and more than one in 10 have been evicted from their homes because of their gender identity.

The increased vulnerability to violence and harassment, loss of social support, and mounting despair suggests that policies like SB 2199 present severe barriers to health and well-being to individuals who are transgender or non-gender conforming as well as social workers who work with LGBTQ+ clients.

On behalf of NASW-ND, I urge you to oppose SB 2199 regarding gender usage in the ND Century Code.

Sincerely,

Kristin Rubbelke, LSW, MSW, MASJ
Executive Director
NASW-ND