

House Human Services Committee  
Jan 27th, 2025  
HB 1144  
Testimony in Opposition

Chair Ruby and Members of the Human Services Committee:

I am writing in opposition to HB 1144. **Schools, students and families should be able to work together to protect our transgender youth and this bill takes that flexibility away from our communities.**

A recent survey of students in North Dakota indicates that the percentage of youth in North Dakota with a transgender experience is similar to that of the rest of the country. **As a psychologist** who works with young people and their families across the state, **I am well aware of the pain that this bill would cause.**

**Imagine a young transgender boy, Michael**, who struggled to come out to his parents. At first, the family was angry, confused and unsure how to respond. Living in a rural community, they worked hard to educate themselves. Connecting to a network of other families and allies helped them to understand the nature of gender dysphoria - a misalignment between body and brain development.

Initially, the father wondered if trying to change their child's behaviors (push more feminine behaviors) would help. However, the father reviewed the research and came to understand that this kind of push can be very damaging. Instead, **they allowed Michael to explore what things made him more himself, and the relationship between father and son improved.**

Seeing Michael flourish, the **parents spoke with the school about ways for Michael to be more comfortable in the learning environment.** After reviewing the pros and cons of different options, it was agreed that Micheal would go by male pronouns and use the boy's bathroom. School officials indicated that if there were any problems with this arrangement, it would need to be reviewed. However, **most of Michael's peers already recognized Michael as a boy. Michael used the bathroom in an appropriate way, and did not draw any attention to himself in the process. As time went on, Michael's grades improved, he started to participate in the school yearbook, and he reported having improvements in relationships with peers and teachers.**

Now imagine that this family sees this bill becoming law. They know that their school is supportive of Michael and want the best for him. However, school officials are now compelled to change course on a plan that is working. Most people have forgotten about Michael's gender history. **To suddenly compel Michael to change bathrooms and pronouns would confuse those around him and open him up to new dangers, including harassment and possibly violence.**

This bill will hurt our students and families that need support the most. Schools should have the flexibility to listen to the needs of students and families in coming up with plans to manage health and well-being. Not every gender diverse person will need to have a change in their pronouns or use a particular bathroom. Many individuals will be okay with using a separate facility. However, this bill unfairly dictates how to treat every situation. **This bill is bad for students, disrespectful of the rights of families, and unnecessarily limiting a school's ability to respond to complex situations.**

In conclusion, I hope that you will recognize that this bill is attempting to solve a problem that does not exist. Instead, it would create a more caustic environment for **students who are just trying to go to school and live their lives.**

Thus, I ask that you vote Do Not Pass on HB 1144.

Respectfully,

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