

Members of the ND Senate Education Committee and Senator Burckhard (D5):

I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 1144. This bill infringes upon transgender students' rights to dignity, privacy, and equal access to education while also placing unnecessary burdens on school districts, educators, and families.

The bill disregards the fundamental rights of transgender students by enforcing rigid policies that deny them the ability to use facilities consistent with their gender identity. These restrictions create an exclusionary environment, increasing isolation and mental health risks. Transgender individuals are a recognized part of our communities, and legislation cannot erase their existence or the challenges they face.

Studies by the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics indicate that transgender youth face higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation due to discrimination and lack of affirming policies. Denying transgender people access to gender-appropriate facilities and limiting accommodations exacerbates these issues, leading to unsafe and hostile school environments.

Beyond its impact on students, this bill also imposes excessive penalties on educators and school officials. This excessive oversight could lead to an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among teachers and administrators, discouraging inclusive practices and further alienating students in need of support.

Requiring school boards to implement restrictive restroom policies removes local control and decision-making authority. Schools are best positioned to develop policies that reflect the needs of their students and communities, rather than adhering to a one-size-fits-all mandate from the state legislature.

Instead of restrictive legislation that marginalizes vulnerable students, North Dakota should support policies that foster safety and respect for all students. Schools should have the autonomy to implement accommodations that ensure all students can access education in a safe and equitable manner, free from discrimination or punitive measures.

I urge you to vote against this harmful legislation and instead advocate for policies that protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all North Dakota students. Ensuring that schools remain safe, affirming environments for every student should be the priority, rather than implementing measures that promote exclusion and legal penalties.

I hope you will stand against this bill and support the fundamental rights of all students in North Dakota.

Andy Bertsch
District 5 Resident