

Chairman Beard, Vice Chairmen Lemm, and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Cassandra Coghill, and I am a lifelong North Dakota resident. I grew up in our public school system, and I am now a mother to two children (ages 8 and 11). I am writing today in opposition to House Bill 1144, which restricts schools from instructing staff to use children's preferred pronouns and which bans the use of unisex bathroom designs in public schools. I have read a considerable amount of the testimony in favor of this bill and have distilled my thoughts down into two main areas of concern: pronoun usage and suicidality, and bathroom stalls and safety/privacy.

1. **Pronoun Usage and Suicidality:** Research into health outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth consistently indicates that using a young person's preferred pronouns dramatically reduces their risk of suicidality. This is a simple gesture that helps keep our children alive. Why would anyone want to privilege the sensibilities of some of the adults working in our schools above the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable youth? If this bill is implemented and suicides among young people in our state increase (which is the most likely and obvious outcome of this policy, based on the data we have), the deaths of those children will be on your hands. Do you really feel comfortable with risking that?
2. **Bathroom Stalls and Safety/Privacy:** I can only assume that anybody who is upset about the use of unisex bathrooms in schools, quite literally, doesn't understand how they work, because it is extremely obvious to me that unisex bathroom design only INCREASES safety and privacy for ALL students. With unisex bathrooms, students are using lockable "stalls" that are essentially completely private, individual toilet areas with walls from floor to ceiling-- no gaps toward the top and bottom like what we see with traditional bathroom stalls. Only the sink area is shared. Students in schools that have implemented this design report feeling safer and more comfortable using these private stalls than the traditional, open stalls we see in gendered bathrooms. Administrators in these schools report a reduction in problematic behaviors like smoking in bathrooms as well. Because only the individual area is private (and the shared sink area is open to the hall), students do not have access to a shared, private area where they can collectively engage in prohibited and risky behaviors as a group and with their peers, outside the supervision of school staff, during school hours. As I said, implementing a unisex bathroom design in public schools only INCREASES privacy and safety for ALL students.

In light of these and the many other important points those testifying in opposition to this bill are making here, I would ask that you prioritize the actual safety of our kids across the board, over the fragile sensibilities of some adults, and give this bill a "do not pass" recommendation.

Thank you,

Cassandra A. Coghill (Fargo, ND)

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