

Dear Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB 1144.

As a parent in District 15, I am deeply concerned about recent developments that jeopardize student privacy. Our district is building a 5th-grade addition that would force elementary-aged children to share bathroom facilities with the opposite gender. Despite parental efforts—petitioning nearly 900 signatures (500 from our district area) and voicing concerns to the school board—we have been met with an unresponsive board, ignoring the heart of the privacy protections outlined in Section 15.1-06-21 of the North Dakota Century Code.

Personally, even as an adult, I find gender-neutral bathrooms uncomfortable, and I do not want this to become the norm in our schools. What is most troubling is that the rationale behind the planned design of the new bathroom facilities appears to be influenced by a desire to support transgender ideology at the elementary level since IT IS possible to design restrooms that accommodate ALL students and minimize bathroom bullying without making them gender-neutral. In doing so [supporting transgender ideology], our school's current plan forces all children to share facilities with the opposite gender, potentially exposing them to situations where privacy is compromised—such as when a door is not properly locked, girls needing to clean up after boys before using a toilet seat or boys being exposed to used and unused menstrual products.

Now, all children are being forced to give up their privacy as boys and girls, in the name of being gender-neutral, even though accommodations can be made for students who may not feel comfortable using a bathroom designated for their biological sex.

While HB 1144 does not fully eliminate all concerns, (such as the potential for bathrooms to remain gender-neutral such as our school has found a loop whole for), it would at least require separation of wash stations for boys and girls, offering a vital step toward protecting student privacy.

The revisions introduced in this bill are essential. In any other context, if an institution fails to comply with the law, it faces consequences. The lack of penalties for not adhering to laws protecting student privacy undermines the effectiveness of those laws. If there are no consequences, what is the point of having these protections in place?

These issues are not trivial. Our children's dignity and privacy are at stake. Our students deserve to have their genders as male and female be respected in ways that support their understanding of their own bodily autonomy. When a school board fails to engage with concerned parents and a district disregards a petition, we must turn to our elected representatives for help.

With construction set to begin soon, I urge you to support HB 1144 to prioritize our children's safety and privacy.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Kristina Sogge