

Members of the Committee, I want to come before you today to urge a DO NOT PASS on HB 1144. It pains me to see how we as a society have let fear, intolerance and misinformation direct our policies in ways that are so damaging to people who are already marginalized. We pretend it is to "protect" our students, but the lack of protection for transgendered or gender non-conforming individuals speaks volumes on what is really motivating these laws. The people our daughters need to fear in restrooms, schools, churches and the community are not transgendered individuals. Statistically speaking, females are at risk from cis-gendered males at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, we don't seem to want to address the true threat to our children; instead we identify the "boogey man" as transgendered individuals and pretend that by limiting their access to restrooms, we are protecting our children. What we are actually doing is supporting an environment of hostility that supports bullying and violence. Additionally, the restrictions placed upon teachers and schools in terms of using the pronouns preferred by the student remains another area of lack of compassion and empathy for these students. And why? Why do we continue to try to make life more difficult for people who are already marginalized by society and are just trying to live their best, authentic life. I wonder what would happen if each of us would take the time to visit with and really get to know a transgendered or gender non-conforming individual. I challenge each of you to do so. I like to believe we would then be able to stand before them with open arms and an open heart, and walk beside them on this often difficult journey of life. I urge you to acknowledge the personhood of all of our students and vote DO NOT PASS on HB 1144. Thank you for your time. Peggy Stenehjem-Titus Fargo, ND