

House Bill No. 1181  
Testimony in Opposition  
Senate Education Committee  
Submitted by: Anna Frissell, Youthworks  
3/22/25

Chairman Beard and Members of the Senate Education Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. As an organization whose mission is to ensure all youth have a safe place to belong and be heard, Youthworks is in strong opposition to House Bill No. 1181 for the following reasons:

### The Bill Harms Vulnerable Youth

HB 1181 mandates that words referring to a person's sex, gender, gender identity, or gender expression must align strictly with their sex assigned at birth—even when contested. This rigid language erases the lived realities of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive youth. Research shows that youth who are denied the ability to express their gender identity are at significantly higher risk for depression, anxiety, suicidality, and disengagement from school and community life.

According to North Dakota's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), transgender and nonbinary youth in North Dakota are four to five times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. They are also 10 times more likely to experience sexual exploitation through the non-consensual sharing of images, and 9.5 times more likely to face housing instability or be at risk for homelessness compared to other high school students. Across disciplines, research supports the fact that affirming environments, including schools and public institutions that respect chosen names and pronouns, are directly correlated with reduced mental health risks.

### The Bill Conflicts with Established Best Practices in Social Work and Education

Professional codes of ethics—including those from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the American Psychological Association—stress the importance of cultural competence, respect for diversity, and the duty to affirm clients' identities. This bill would require professionals working in state-funded institutions to act in ways that contradict their training, ethical standards, and clinical judgment, placing them in impossible positions and further harming the youth they serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me if I can provide any further assistance regarding this bill or any other legislative matter.

Anna Frissell  
Youthworks