



Letter of Opposition to Bill HB 1298

Dear Chairman Weisz and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dave Williams. I am the President of the Bismarck North Dakota Chapter of Parents, Friends, and Allies of people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or the short version, (PFLAG) Bismarck.

But, most importantly, I am the father of a transgender teenager, a human being of great integrity and courage, of whom I am very proud.

My teenager began the journey to their truth around age 11, about 4 or 5 years ago. As conservative parents, we felt it was just a phase and naturally opposed the reality that our child was transgender. As time has gone on, we have come to realize that our child's identity is not "just a phase." And we have had to change our views, become educated by top researchers, doctors and specialty psychologists, and come to grips as parents with the knowledge that being transgender is not a choice or a lifestyle. Being transgender is the realization that their gender identity is the opposite of their assigned sex at birth.

Our child has experienced gender dysphoria, which is the feeling of discomfort or distress that occurs in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth or sex-related physical characteristics. This led to self-harm and thoughts of suicide. I can attest to the fact that this is a very real and scary experience for children and their parents alike. We have experienced the loss of family and friends over it, the shaming, and untruths. It has taken a lot of love, and therapy on all sides to both allow, support, and embrace this change. But once they were free to be themselves, our child became a regular teenager with all the everyday teenage problems.

One hurdle we had to cross was our child's desire to participate in track at the middle school level. We felt a great deal of trepidation to say the least- the fear for their safety and opening the door to being bullied. But our child convinced us that it was worth it to experience school sports and be a part of a team. We met with the coaches. They were professionals and treated our child like anyone else- no favoritism, no shaming; just practice hard and represent your school. The next hurdle was the teammates. Would they be proud athletes or bullies?

What we found was, as soon as they experienced that our child was just a kid playing sports, who worked hard and participated, any fear and need to shame our child turned to the support of a fellow competitor.

The real reason for sports in school was made very clear to us. Our child went from a reclusive outcast to being part of something and allowing our child to be who they are. I only wish the people in the stands would have taken cues from the team. But I guess you cannot expect that many miracles.

My family's experience and reality does make me want to take a stand and to state that:

- All kids, including transgender kids, deserve the same chances to be part of a team, to learn from one another, and to respect the game.
- Raising alarms about unfair advantages or locker room antics are all about fearmongering and have nothing to do with protecting kids.
- For kids especially, being transgender has no unfair medical advantage.

HB1298 is a bill to criminalize schools and programs that allow transgender students (kindergarten through college) to participate in sports. The impact a bill like this will have is to subject our trans youth to bullying and demeaning expectations. This is being done to kids behind their back and before some of them are old enough to understand what is being debated here in this committee and in the legislature.

Banning any kids from playing sports is against what sports participation is about. The truth is that NCAA and IOCC rules, which are used in North Dakota schools, have meant that trans people have been participating in athletics for years. Yet not one sport is dominated by trans athletes. Raising alarms about unfair advantages or locker room antics again, are all about fearmongering and have nothing to do with protecting our kids. Let them play!

Transgender kids are fierce fighters with integrity and honor. Their friends, family, teachers, coaches, doctors, and mentors know that these young people are smart, talented, and have incredible courage. These youth are a viable and vital part of the next generation of leaders.

I, we, implore you as human beings on this committee, to defend transgender kids' rights to achieve their full potential, in school and through athletics. As parents, families, and allies in North Dakota, we support every child's right to participate in athletics authentically — inclusive of transgender and nonbinary youth. — And we remind legislators that, while many of our targeted youth cannot yet vote, their families and allies do!

This is not a partisan issue. This is right versus wrong. House Bill 1298 is marginalizing Transgender children, to say, “you are less than others because of who you are, and you will not be included.”

A spiritual book many of us read gives an account of a being who was once reduced to a man and was literally put to death because people feared this person, because he was different, and taught a gospel of hope and inclusion. Please do not be those people.

I urge the committee to recommend Do Not Pass on House Bill 1298

Thank you,

Dave Williams