



My name is James Falcon and I am one of the Co-Directors of Magic City Equality in Minot, North Dakota. We are an educational nonprofit organization that provides information and training related to LGBTQ2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and Two Spirit) issues. We are testifying **in opposition** to HB 1298 relating to students' participation in sports designated exclusively for males or females.

"Exclusive" means the exact opposite of our mission. We believe in equality for all. The population we represent are already excluded from participating in several events throughout their adolescence. Many youths in North Dakota look forward to homecoming dances, proms, and athletic events. Throwing up laws that prevent children from participating is not only exclusionary, it also sends a message to our LGBTQ2S+ youth: "You are not accepted here." According to research, LGBTQ2S+ students who compete in high school sports report feeling a positive sense of belonging at school. The psychological benefits of sports specifically include improved emotional regulation, decreased hopelessness and suicidality, fewer depressive symptoms, and higher self-esteem. [[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)]

Students who participate in sports have higher feelings of belonging and school pride. Denying a child the opportunity to participate in the same athletic events as their peers is harmful and teaches children that "different" is wrong. If there are concerns in athletics that stem from feelings of

“unfairness,” don’t punish the students. An eligibility policy is already in place with the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA). We have the knowledge and the skills to include all athletes. Let’s come together to work on policies that promote inclusion and a true team spirit. Let’s use some teamwork and change the playbook to accommodate more children – not fewer.

Magic City Equality is one of many state agencies ready to roll up their sleeves and work toward an inclusive rewriting of the guidelines. Your consideration is very much appreciated.

On behalf of Magic City Equality, as well as the LGBTQ2S+ community in Minot, as well as North Dakota, we urge you to oppose HB 1298.