

March 16, 2021

The Honorable Diane Larson, Chair
North Dakota Senate Judiciary Committee

Good afternoon Senator Larson and Members of the Committee and thank you for this opportunity. I'm here to oppose passage of Engrossed House Bill 1298. I speak on behalf of the Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo CVB, as well as the Travel Alliance Partnership. I do not come here lightly to do this and am—frankly—a little bit out of my comfort zone wading into a debate that is so fraught with emotion. I would much rather be here in my usual role of advocating for increased support for travel and tourism, the state's third largest industry behind oil and agriculture. But, in the end, this is directly related to that. I'm here to share my belief that passage of this bill will have a negative—perhaps devastatingly negative—effect on the economy of cities in the state that work hard to fill hotels, restaurants and retail stores with teams and their families.

Let me be clear about this—I claim no expertise and offer no opinion as to when, where or against whom transitioning athletes should compete, and I respectfully submit that the same is true of most members of the House and Senate. On the other hand, the governing and sanctioning bodies of virtually every sport in the world have studied this issue for decades, consulted with experts, and come up with nuanced policies based on what they've learned. That fact alone makes this bill completely unnecessary. Please, please, leave this issue to the groups who have been dealing with it for so long.

But here's the real crux of my opposition: *This bill is anti-business*, and by that, I mean anti-Main Street business. The travel, tourism and hospitality industry in North Dakota lost about \$1.2 Billion dollars in 2020. \$94 Million of that was lost state and local tax revenue. In Fargo, West Fargo, and Moorhead, where I work, 2020 hotel room revenue was down 40%, or \$40 Million. That's just room revenue, in one market. The modest recovery we've experienced between last summer and this spring is largely due to the return of youth sports. This is big business for our state. In the pre-pandemic year of 2019 the Sports Team at our CVB assisted with events that led to direct visitor spending of more than \$10 Million, and that's a conservative estimate. USA Wrestling has been bringing a 10-day tournament to the Fargo Dome for more than 25 years. That group's transgender policy closely mirrors that of the International Olympic Committee. If passage of this measure caused us to lose *only that event*, that direct spending figure would shrink by almost \$2 Million. By the way, I've heard supporters of this measure refer to the IOC's transgender policy as "willy-nilly". It's not. It's very detailed. The North Dakota High School Activities Association policy closely mirrors that of the NCAA. Also very detailed.

So, in a year when a pandemic devastated the hospitality industry, the last thing we need is a new law that throws fresh roadblocks in the way of attracting sports tourism to our communities. I know this was not the intention of the Bill's sponsors, and I have seen proposed amendments that aim to address some of our concerns, including allowing Destination Marketing Organizations like ours to sponsor events without restriction. But passage of this measure would put most of our local youth sports groups out of step with their sanctioning bodies and discourage *if not prohibit* out-of-state sports organizations from sponsoring tournaments in North Dakota, or even letting their sanctioned teams play here. It would likely also mean that those young North Dakota athletes wouldn't be able compete in any sanctioned competitions, anywhere, as well. Please say no to this bill.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions, either in person now or via email or a phone call.

Sincerely,



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