

Gracia Larsen-Schmidt
Testimony for HB 1298
Grand Forks, North Dakota
March 16th, 2021

Hello, Chairwoman Larson and Members of the Committee.

My name is Gracia Larsen-Schmidt. I am a high school senior from Grand Forks and I left school to attend this hearing today. I am urging you to vote “no” on H.B. 1298.

I have competed at the varsity level in both cross country and track all four years of high school. In fact, this past cross country season I placed All-Conference at the Eastern Dakota Conference. As an athlete, I know with distinct clarity the difference that gender makes in performance ability. I would go further to say that sports involving running are where that difference is most apparent. I do agree that I would feel disadvantaged if I were expected to compete against the boys my age. However, under the current North Dakota High School Activities Association guidelines, I have not, and would not ever be expected to compete against boys. I may be expected to compete against a trans female who has been treated with testosterone suppression medication, but only if that girl had been treated with medication for at least a full year. It is clear to me that under these guidelines, I do not have to worry that I am being discriminated against.

I am a competitive athlete, and I know how good it feels to race well and to be recognized for my accomplishments. I train year-round in order to be at the top of my game, and to be in the best physical shape possible. I understand the concern for fairness in high school sports, but I do not feel that my ability to compete on a fair playing field is endangered by trans girls who have completed a gender transition. If the claim is that this bill would protect female athletes, I believe the concern is unwarranted. Have any female high school athletes in North Dakota actually requested this so-called protection?

I would like to remind you that H.B. 1298 is not a question of whether or not you agree with the concept of gender changes. It is a question of whether or not trans teenagers deserve the opportunity to be involved in sports. I am sure you can sympathize with a teenager's desire to be involved in school activities. Some of you may have or have had teenagers. At the very least all of you were teenagers once. I ask you to put yourselves in the shoes of the teenagers whose lives we are discussing today.

High school is not easy for anyone. Personally, high school has been made a lot easier by the community of people I have found within my sports. I am in cross country and track because I love competing and pushing myself to be better every day, but I am also in the sports because of the incredible community of people I have found. I have never questioned that my teammates and coaches have my back, and I have found my best friends through my involvement in sports. I can't imagine what my high school experience would be like without that community encouraging me. To vote yes on H.B. 1298 is to steal that supportive community away from transgender teenagers.

Under the NDHSAA's current guidelines, transgender athletes are already held to a standard separate from that of cisgender athletes- in other words, it is clear that those who would chose to ban these athletes are not protecting what is fair. By voting yes on on H.B. 1298, you're sending the message that transgender teenagers do not deserve to represent their schools in sports.

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We all have the right to our own personal beliefs about gender transition, but you, who have been elected to serve all North Dakotans, do not have the right to discriminate against transgender teens based on those beliefs, and you certainly don't have the right to claim that it is for my sake.

For that reason, I urge you to vote no on H.B. 1298.