

March 16th, 2021

RE: Opposition to HB 1298

Good Morning Chairman Weisz and Committee Members;

I am Sarah Galbraith and I am opposed to HB 1298 as a community leader, an advocate, an ally and a caregiver.

Our youth in North Dakota has been exposed to higher amounts of intolerance and targeting as we have navigated the topics of gender and sexuality in our schools. I can say this because my inbox (as well as the inbox of my persona, B.J. Armani) is flooded with messages from parents and their children asking what can they do to avoid bullying by fellow students, coaches, and their teachers.

These students as young as five years old are having their clothes stolen, and their desks, backpacks, books and lockers defaced with derogatory comments and pictures. The schools do nothing about the words FAG, FREAK, SICKO, WEIRDO or TRANNY and ask the parents/students to pay for the cleanup or the replacement of items.

Students as young as eight years old have been told to wear a diaper to school so they don't have to worry about the bathroom. Students are also explaining to me that they have had bladder infections and have had to stop eating/drinking after 7am until they come home for school because they are scared of using the bathroom.

This environment has paved the way for HB 1298. It would also give grounds to coaches, teachers, and students that this environment of fear and bullying is okay. This correlates with the students' use of gyms and equipment for sports as they are told that the two genders recognized by their coaches and educational system is the locker room they have to abide by. The wording of this bill has reduced our children to genitalia and not given any thought to their need for compassion, belonging, and support. These student athletes have immense courage to express that the body they were born in doesn't match their identity. These students bravely explain themselves time and time again to adults and students as they go to therapy and utilize the medical field to process their identity in a safe and therapeutic manner. While they are given the support by professionals, family, and friends, they face the judgement of their school system and the defense of their bullies as a backdoor way for the school to remove these students to avoid actually making change.

By disguising HB 1298 as defending cisgender children this is, in effect, sexual harassment/assault that is being allowed by our public school system. These moments bring shame and isolation to these students, further making their environment unsafe and their parents unable to utilize the very educational system that is supposed to be public education.

The knowledge of what you have heard about the saving of lives of students cannot fall on deaf ears of our elected North Dakota officials. I strongly urge the committee to vote DO NOT PASS on HB 1298. If there are further questions regarding my testimony, my contact information is listed below.

Thank you,

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