

Katrina Josephine-Andrea Koesterman
Testimony on HB 1298
3/16/2021

RE: Testimony in Opposition of HB 1298

Good afternoon Chairwoman Larson and Members of the Committee.

My name is Katrina Koesterman, and I am president of Tristate Transgender, an organization based in Fargo, ND which serves the transgender populations of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. I also happen to be transgender myself. Today, I am here to urge the committee to vote NO on HB 1298.

From my role as president of the Tristate Transgender, I wish to express the views of many of the North Dakota residents who have come to me with their concerns.

Almost every North Dakota resident I've spoken to regarding this bill thinks that it is harmful and discriminatory towards our student athletes. Rather than protect our young cisgender women, which the bill aims to do, it alienates and discriminates against our young transgender students. Many transgender and non-binary individuals seek integration with their peers rather than wanting to be singled out. Barring a young transgender woman from competing with her other women classmates makes her the other, the different, and as a result, the target of harassment and abuse.

Many important life lessons are learned in sports; such as leadership, confidence, self-respect, and what it means to be part of a team. By passing HB 1298, transgender students would be singled out and more vulnerable to bullying, rejection, and violence. This will lead to higher rates of self-harm and suicide, which are already significantly higher with transgender students. However, according to the Trevor Project, the world's largest suicide and crisis prevention organization for LGBTQ young people. LGBTQ youth who participate in sports reported nearly 20% lower rates of depression. Even better, transgender youth who participated in sports reported grades as mostly A's.

In the North Dakota High school Activities Associations already existing sporting regulations, it already require transgender athletes to meet hormonal standards before being allowed to compete in the division corresponding to their gender identity.

At the age of 18 or younger, one year of hormone replacement and/or puberty blocking drugs will have very profound effects on muscle mass, bone density, and other performance-related attributes of a student athlete. This means that a transgender woman meeting the already existing requirements will have similar physical characteristics to a cisgender woman, and a transgender man will have similar physical characteristics to a cisgender man.

Lastly, if this bill passes, it will force a transgender man, assigned female at birth, to compete with cisgender women his own age. This will cause the very unfair conditions this bill claims to be trying to protect against: making someone with male characteristics compete with someone with female characteristics.

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Now, as I am 35 years old, I am no longer a high school student, and as you can guess from my size, I am not nor have I ever been an athlete. I am, however, a member of a community to which a growing number of student athletes belong. It is for them I hope to speak. Our ND transgender youth should receive the same opportunities as their peers. To participate in school activities that build life-long skills and relationships that help them become successful adults.

I therefore urge you to vote against HB 1298. Discrimination is not now nor ever should be a North Dakota value. I hope you will agree.