

Chairman Larsen and the Senate Committee,

Hello, my name is Alex Johnson and I am a resident of Williston, North Dakota. I am very active in volunteering my time here and throughout the state to better our state and local community. I am a board member for the North Dakota Human Rights Coalition, President and founder of The Rainbow Rendezvous, Coordinator for the ND LGBTQ+ Summit, Lead organizer for the Bridging the Gap cultural event. What I am doing, and many others in the state, are working to help people and build a more connected and supportive community. We work to promote awareness and advocacy to which is very much needed in our state. I have met with families that have moved out of the state because they can no longer stand by as their child is suffering. I have met adults who have finally opened up about their sexuality after most of their life, hiding. I have met with people who have lost loved ones to suicide because they felt they could not be accepted for who they are in their own home state. Now, I am having to take note of another issue, a family who has a child that is transitioning who was just talking about wanting to play sports, but will now possibly be denied that opportunity.

All of you are the representatives of my home state. You hold office because you were elected to take a position to help our state become something better than it was when you took office. With bills like this, our state is purposefully pushing out North Dakotans out of our state, it is pushing youth away from following their dreams, and it is creating a very negative view of a place that I have always loved and supported. I would encourage North Dakotans to take a step away from their "traditional" belief systems and reach out to members of their communities that are not of their own traditions and work at creating a sense of understanding. We spend too much time distancing away from that which we don't understand. It causes division. That division allows people to spread hatred and discrimination before trying to even a semblance of understanding to what makes them uncomfortable. I challenge every member of our wonderful state to try to become more aware of those members that are different from them, and to truly try to understand those differences rather than shame them. I want you to take a moment and to think of those members of our state who have left because of the hatred in these beliefs that are being carried out in bills like this, I want you to take a moment to think of those who have chosen they couldn't live with the hatred that they faced because of the bullying and discrimination that you have, in a way, supported through these bills, and then I'd like you to take a moment to think about the youth, who should one day become leaders to promote community, rather than this hatred and division that you are opening trying to promote. Be a true North Dakotan here and care for your neighbors.

Thank you,

Members of Rainbow Rendezvous

Williston, ND