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To: Senate Human Services Committee
From: Christopher Dodson, Executive Director
Subject: House Bill 1254 - Protection of Minors from Gender Transitioning Interventions
Date: March 15, 2023

The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports House Bill 1254, especially as it relates to surgeries.

The Catholic Church affirms the God-given dignity of every human life. Persons with gender dysphoria or feelings of gender incongruence are due respect, love, and care.

As in all things, however, respect, love, and care sometimes mean placing limits. Two sets of facts illustrate why this is one of those cases.

The first set concerns the medical interventions themselves. Each intervention included in the bill — puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and surgeries — act on the physical body so that it takes on the characteristics of the person’s self-identified gender. Each harms or suppresses healthy bodily functions, tissue, or organs. They do not treat any disease. No illness is averted and no pathology is treated. In the case of surgery, it is the alteration or removal of healthy organs and tissue, an act also known as mutilation. The consequences are permanent, can cause sterilization, and lead to the inability to physically enjoy sex in later years.

Some argue that as a result of these interventions, the individual might have less stress, anxiety, or depression. These are what are called “consequentialist” appeals. They ignore that the act itself harms the body and that the act does not directly treat (not medically indicated for) the feeling of gender incongruence.

The second set concerns our development as a human person. Medical science confirms that sex is determined at conception and is genetically present in every cell. It is manifested throughout the body, including a person’s endocrinology, brain, and anatomy. All of this interacts within the body, particularly while a person is reaching maturity.

At the same time, young persons grow and develop emotionally, mentally, socially, and sexually in relation to their sex. A child’s sex is inseparable from the child’s progress toward maturity and their fuller understanding of themselves and the world.

Recognition of this progress toward maturity is why we have laws preventing minors from engaging in certain acts or having certain acts done to them. It is out of care and respect for minors that we enact such laws.

House Bill 1254 falls within this area. According to North Dakota law, minors cannot legally consent to sex because they lack the ability to fully comprehend their actions. If they lack the ability to fully comprehend their actions, why would we allow having procedures done to them that cause the loss of fertility or full sexual function in later years?

Children with issues of gender/body incongruence are with us. They are among our relatives, neighbors, and our own children's friends. No matter what are our views on gender ideology, they should be welcome in our homes, churches, and community no differently than any other child.

But as we do for all children, sometimes society, out of love and care, has an obligation to say, "Not this. Not yet."

We urge a **Do Pass** recommendation on SB 1254.