

As a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in North Dakota, I urge you to oppose SB 2231

LGBTQ Youth are more than 4 times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020). This isn't a result of the label, it's a direct outcome of being marginalized and discriminated against. This bill, and others that seek to further limit the LGBTQ+ community directly contribute to the increased risk of suicide.

I've seen this firsthand in my office from youth and young adults who share things like, "I don't belong here," "It's clear I'm not wanted," and "it's stuff like this that makes me want to die." As a mental health provider, I cannot support a bill that contributes to a community where members do not feel entitled to live the lives they are born into. More than half of transgender and nonbinary youth seriously considered suicide in the last year (Trevor Project 2022 National Survey on Youth Mental Health). North Dakota cannot afford to pass legislation that contributes to this.

School districts already have policies in place for students whose gender does not match their sex assigned at birth. Professional development time should be used to educate professionals on the needs of all their students, including those of diverse backgrounds.

In no other situation is it appropriate for teachers to go against the wishes of the child and the parent. If a teacher doesn't like a student's name, do they get to call them something else? Will a parent receive notes home about an unflattering haircut or their child's choice of tee shirt color? What about a child's religious beliefs or the choice of food they bring for snack?

There are many students who would rather not go to school, than have to detransition in front of their peers. Or be consistently outed by a teacher who won't acknowledge them for who they are. This bill discourages participation for all in public education. Families of transgender youth have talked about removing their child(ren) from public schooling or moving out of state if bills such as this pass.

This bill does not consider the intersex population. Intersex people are born at an estimated 1.7% of the population, more common than Down's Syndrome or other genetic differences. This bill does not account for those individuals as well.

This is not a bill that recognizes or appreciates a diverse population of North Dakotans and will result in loss of community members. It does not make North Dakota a desirable place to live and is not reflective of the values that most North Dakotans hold toward their friends, neighbors and family members.

I strongly urge you to oppose SB 2231.