

I am Samantha, a ND resident, psychologist, mother, daughter, friend, sister and advocate. I am writing this letter on behalf of my husband and I, both of us born and raised North Dakotans. We are providing this testimony in opposition to bill 2231, which would prevent school policy that acknowledges gender identity.

I write this testimony from a personal and professional perspective, as it's hard to separate the two as a mom to a gender non-conforming son and a psychologist who works with transgender youth in the school system. I can't help but advocate for other children and parents across the state, whose children have many years left in our local public school system, and could be greatly impacted by such a law. My husband is also a teacher in our local high school, and the detrimental impact such a law would have on his work and how he does his job. So, for many reasons, I would like to introduce you to our family.

My husband, Tanner and I, have 3 beautiful children, ages 7, 6 and 3. Our 7 year old son is kind, intelligent, timid and a lover of all sports. Our 6 year old, is a silly, fairy and mermaid loving boy, who takes great pride in his long curly locks and non-conforming fashion style that includes, leggings, skirts, dresses and sparkles. He loves singing and has a great sense of humor. Our daughter is a sassy, sweet and smart little firecracker of personality. This letter is addressing my middle son specifically, because how we choose to parent him and who he is, seems to cause controversy, hurt feelings, confusion and curiosity.

We take great pride and joy in our children, as do most parents. However, that doesn't mean parenting a child who is non-confirming in regards to their style of dress and interests has always been easy. There have been many moments of fear, sadness and anger along the way. There's also been growth, love and so much pride. These feelings began when our son was 2 years and 3 months, when he very first started dawning his baby blankets as a "dress" in his cute voice, and asking to put my tank tops on as dresses also. As most people, we thought it to be just a "phase" or a kid being a kid. Well, 4 years later it has only grown and developed into a unique, happy, smart and fun loving kid who loves even more his dresses, leggings, Mario, makeup and rainbow colors. Now, in those 4 years the feelings I reference weren't because our son was and continued to like all things "girly", the fear, anger and sadness has been from knowing how some people WILL treat him and judge him, throughout his life. People who don't understand or think his interests could have been avoided if we had parented differently. Personally and professionally, I know the instinctual response to lack of understanding is judgement. I know people judge and then create the "story" or justification that fits their fund of knowledge, even at times without intention. My work has lent me to understand this automatic thought process very well, so I do my best not to judge those who judge, and instead try remind myself of their lack of understanding. You must believe we have heard it all, from "he will grow out of it" to "he must like to copy his mom." Anyone who knows me, knows that I am not anything of a girly fashionista, and at this point can say my 6-year-old has surpassed me in that dept. I prefer to wear jeans and a tee shirt if given the choice.

We do acknowledge that we don't know what his future self will be like, he may "outgrow" and change his interests, but this is who is NOW and as his parents we are going to honor that to highest degree. The core values in our home include love and truth, which we want to foster and model for our children in all aspects of life, not only when it's convenient. I can remember fondly the day I bought him his first dress from a second hand store after months of contemplating that decision, the genuine wide smile on his face was the epitome of love. He loved that dress...he loved how he looked...he loved me for buying it for him, and allowing him to wear it nearly every day and everywhere. That's what we want for our children if we are able to provide it, LOVE. I'm sure all parents want for their kids to feel loved and experience joy in something as simple as what they are wearing. We couldn't imagine keeping that amount of love and truth from our child daily because of fear or lack of understanding. We can't, and will never choose to withhold happiness, truth and love from our children for who they are.

Despite our early efforts to encourage him to like trains, cars, dinosaurs, sports and the color blue...his true self didn't waver. We admire his spirit for never giving in to the pressure I'm sure he felt at times from us and others. We hold firm to our strongly held belief that his two-spirit nature is here, on this earth, in this state, to spread that love, far and wide. We write this not only to support our son, but all kids, teens, and adults who feel they can't be themselves. We write this so people like our son, or those different in any way, can be seen and respected for the beautiful human they are, rather than judged and misperceived from what is not understood.

Now that you've been introduced to our experience with a gender non-conforming son, and that it's possible he is transgender or non-binary, I'm hoping you can better understand our concern with a bill such as 2231, which could derail the happiness and pride we have worked so hard to instill and maintain the past 4 years. If he was your child, grandchild, or nephew, would support and be okay with sending him to a public school where teachers are unable to treat him with respect and acceptance? I don't share this only from a mom perspective, but as a psychologist. It has been made very clear that unsupportive and non-confirming interactions toward transgender youth has traumatic effects on their lives. Research has confidently shown that lack of support or accommodations to transgender students results in higher suicide rates, mental health issues, poor self-esteem and lifelong struggles. Is that what you want for our youth? Is this what you want to be part of in the great state of ND? These are facts, facts that reputable organizations and research teams have proven and report time and time again.

Such a law would also take away the rights of teachers to treat students in a way they personally feel is best for students based on their morals or years of experience in the field. And not only would this bill take away their autonomy, but force teachers to treat students in a way that knowingly causes harm and possible chronic mental health issues. School

should be a place we foster growth, acceptance and respect. Can you really support a bill that would likely be creating trauma for years to come? Do you truly think that taking away autonomy from teachers, and forcing them to participate in correspondence with students in way that has been proven detrimental is a good idea? I can't imagine teachers being satisfied in their already, very difficult jobs, with having to engage in such treatment at the risk of losing their job or being penalized with an abysmal fine. It is very clear, how the proposed bill de-humanizes individuals, making them less than, and subjects them to potential violence and mistreatment. More accurately, such a bill is an attempt to ignore a real and ever existing group of people because they are different than majority and possibly make some people uncomfortable.

I am sure you have some reason(s) why you feel this bill could be helpful to some, otherwise it wouldn't exist. However, it is very clear to many, if transgender students being treated with respect in schools and allowing teachers to treat transgender students with said respect makes people uncomfortable, the problem is not transgender students, or teachers calling them by their preferred pronoun. No, the problem is much bigger than that, and you're putting your energy, opinion and self into the wrong area of finding a solution.

I am hoping this letter is heard, that you have kept your mind open and willing to understand a situation that is often controversial and misconceived, and is replaced with a little bit of compassion, self-reflection and humanistic growth.

Thank you for your attention, I appreciate your time.

Samantha Beauchman
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