

Dear Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My testimony is in opposition to Senate Bill 2231. I ask that you give this bill a Do Not Pass.

My name is Erin Power and I am a deacon serving the Eastern North Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

As a Christian, I believe that God created this world with abundant diversity – and did so intentionally. From the beginning, we saw a multitude of plants and animals being brought forth- we know that it both makes our landscape more colorful and interesting, but also creates a healthier, richer ecosystem. I believe that this divine diversity also extends to us as humans. The varied ways we show up in the world make our landscape more colorful and interesting, but also creates a healthier, richer ecosystem. But only if we foster and support that kind of diversity.

My faith as a follower of Jesus also requires me to love and care for my neighbor, especially those who are vulnerable or at risk of harm or who don't always experience love and welcome. Jesus modeled for us that God's love was for all and challenged those who sought to create barriers or exclude.

As a judicatory, we believe that this love includes LGBTQIA+ people. This past summer, the Eastern North Dakota Synod passed a measure with almost a unanimous vote which included two major recommendations:

- 1) that congregations are encouraged to seek out ways to become truly welcoming communities for all, especially those who have suffered alienation and harm because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, offering them hope and safe harbor in our world; and
- (2) that members of ... [our] congregations, look for opportunities to show their support and advocate for the care and protection of LGBTQIA+ people through members' vocations, our church's own institutional practices, and public policies in our communities and state.

Today I am responding to that call to advocate for the care and protection of LGBTQIA+ people of our state.

But I'm also writing today because I'm an aunt to four kids growing up in North Dakota. My experience of growing up here was a community that was safe and supportive of me as I figured out who I was & grew into adulthood. I want that same supportive space for our youth in North Dakota today. If the youth in my life end up coming out as LGBTQIA, I want them to live in a community that supports them for who they are and how they show up in the world. I want them to feel safe and to thrive and to know that community leaders and educators will support them in who they are. And regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, I want them to grow up in a state that teaches them inclusion, a state that values diversity and cares about who they are. A Do Not Pass vote on this bill will send a clear message that North Dakota is that state.

Deacon Erin Power
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