

Olivia Data
Testimony on SB 2231
January 24, 2023

RE: Testimony in Opposition to SB 2231.

Greetings, Chairman Weisz and members of the committee. My name is Olivia Data, I am the Youth Action Council Coordinator for the North Dakota Women's Network, and I urge you to vote "Do Not Pass" on SB 2231.

The Youth Action Council is an organization that believes in empowering younger generations to participate in their communities and contribute to a brighter future. In order for this to happen, we believe that the youth of North Dakota must have access to education and to a community that supports and respects them. SB 2231 would deny such access for many children.

Although this bill defines preferred pronouns as "a pronoun that does not conform to the individual's assigned sex at birth," the truth is that we all have preferred pronouns. I personally am a cisgender woman – I was assigned female at birth, and I identify as a woman. My preferred pronouns are "she/her," which just so happen to conform to my assigned sex. All of you have pronouns as well, whether or not they are the same as your assigned sex at birth. Learning about and using pronouns is a basic and fundamental part of grammar, and it always has been. There is clearly no logical cause to target using pronouns in general, so the only possible explanation for prohibiting teachers from adopting "a practice regarding expressed gender" or limiting protections for people who use pronouns that differ from those attached to their sex at birth is prejudice and ignorance.

Even in the context of free speech, this bill does not make sense. If you support free speech, then you should support a government entity's ability to respect employee's pronouns in work-related settings. You should support the rights of teachers to teach and communicate with students in their classroom.

Especially in the classroom, SB 2231 poses a serious threat to children. No matter one's personal beliefs on gender identity, the facts do not lie. According to the National Library of Medicine, 82% of transgender people have contemplated killing themselves, and 40% of transgender people have actually attempted suicide¹. Among LGBTQ+ youth, those whose preferred pronouns are not respected by the adults in their life are almost twice as likely to attempt suicide as those whose preferred pronouns are respected². By prohibiting schools and teachers from respecting transgender and nonbinary students, this bill would deny students who do not conform

¹ "Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors." *PubMed*, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32345113/>. Accessed 23 January 2023.

² "Pronouns Usage Among LGBTQ Youth." *The Trevor Project*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/pronouns-usage-among-lgbtq-youth/>. Accessed 23 January 2023.

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to a gender binary the opportunity to learn and live in a community that respects them. This will be detrimental to many children's mental health and happiness.

If we want any hope of a future where people remain compassionate, healthy, and able to pursue happiness, this bill must not pass. Transgender and cisgender people alike deserve to live in a community that supports and respects them.

I urge you to vote "Do Not Pass" on SB 2231. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me regarding my testimony.

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