

January 25, 2023

Dear Chair Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Rev. Karen Van Fossan. I am an ordained minister and licensed professional counselor, serving as a pastoral counselor in the state of North Dakota. **I ask that you give SB 2231 a Do Not Pass recommendation.**

The last time I spoke with you, I shared reflections on my beautiful transgender grandchild – who became my family member after much of his extended family rejected him for being transgender and his mother for supporting his identity. I shared about Halloween costumes, spontaneous dances, and the joyful utterances (like “I love you, Grandma!”) that I now enjoy as a matter of course. I do indeed love my transgender grandchild from the deepest place in my soul. Still, my grandbaby is just one of the reasons I strongly oppose SB 2231.

As a pastor and as a counselor, I am honored to have accompanied a number of trans youth, as they have made life-giving transitions from a prescribed gender identity to an authentic gender identity. It has been my distinct privilege to witness their unfolding, their blossoming, as they see their own sacredness in the eyes of God – and also in the eyes of themselves.

In fact, according to a recent position statement, the American Counseling Association (ACA) says this about gender identity:

“Gender is the product of a complicated interaction of chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, and culture that begins before birth.”

The ACA goes on to say this about ethical counselor conduct:

“The stress brought on by stigma and the pressure to be gender-conforming with an individual’s assigned sex is known to cause minority stress and significantly affect health and wellbeing, even in the face of the resiliency and the strengths of transgender individuals. Counselors know and understand the critical importance of living consistently with one’s gender identity, which may or may not include physical or social gender transition.”

In other words, **the expectations of this bill are in direct conflict with best practices for counselors who serve trans children** – and, I would say, for any adults who serve any children. The more whole any child, any person, can be, the more whole the community becomes.

Much like accommodations – such as elevators and curb-less sidewalk crossings – for people with disabilities, accommodations that schools make for transgender youth ultimately benefit the larger school population. For instance, my other grandchildren, those who are not transgender, have deepened their own sense of self, as well as their own capacity for empathy, by virtue of accommodations our family has made for my transgender grandchild.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to vote Do Not Pass on SB 2231. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Rev. Karen Van Fossan, M.Div., LPC