

Dear Legislative Members,

Subject: Support for House Bill No. 1144

As a mother of three children, their comfort and safety are always my top priority. House Bill No. 1144 provides me with peace of mind knowing that clear policies are in place to protect their privacy and well-being in schools. Schools should be spaces where children feel secure and supported, and this bill ensures that such an environment is maintained.

I am particularly concerned about recent proposals at a local school to install shared-gendered closet-style bathroom stalls with a communal sink area open to the hallway. My main concern is that biological females, for example, may not have a comfortable space to address their specific needs, and I have seen how bathroom-related anxiety can impact both children and adults. In some cases, this has in some cases led to medical issues. Even in professional environments, people—myself included—often make restroom choices that are influenced by emotional or mental comfort, not just practicality. I also carry concerns that these designs, which rely on master key access to stalls, raise significant issues regarding both safety and privacy. My concerns extend beyond the school day to times when the school is used for public events and many people and children are in attendance.

Shared gendered restrooms and shower facilities can present significant safety and privacy concerns, particularly in spaces accessible by multiple individuals simultaneously. These areas are meant to be private and secure, but when this expectation is not upheld, it creates an uncomfortable and potentially harmful environment. By designating these spaces exclusively for males or females based on biological sex, the bill prioritizes the safety and well-being of all students, minimizing the risk of conflicts or misunderstandings.

Additionally, it is important to consider that schools are not only learning environments but also serve as community spaces. Adults using these facilities would undoubtedly feel uncomfortable sharing multi-stall restrooms with individuals of a different biological sex. If adults feel uneasy in these situations, we should empathize with how much more distressing this could be for children, who are still developing their understanding of privacy and boundaries. Ensuring clear and defined restroom policies for schools is crucial to providing a consistent sense of safety for everyone using these facilities.

Disallowing multi-stall gender-neutral restrooms under this bill underscores a commitment to respecting privacy for all students. This ensures that public schools maintain a safe and secure environment not just during school hours, but also for any extracurricular or public activities hosted on campus.

Furthermore, this bill emphasizes the importance of parental involvement and transparency. By requiring collaboration between schools and parents when determining accommodations, the bill ensures that decisions are made with the child's best interests in mind while respecting family values and perspectives.

While this bill provides critical protections for students, it is also important to acknowledge that there may be rare cases where a student does not feel comfortable using either male or female restrooms. In such situations, a family-style restroom or similar private accommodations are perfectly acceptable alternatives that schools can provide to meet the needs of these students. These solutions ensure that everyone has access to safe, comfortable facilities while maintaining the privacy and dignity of all.

I strongly urge your support for House Bill No. 1144 as it advances through the legislative process. Thank you for your leadership and dedication to protecting the safety, comfort, and well-being of North Dakota's students and communities.

Sincerely,
Breanna Demarais
Crary, North Dakota