

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 1254

Date of Hearing: January 24, 2023

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My name is Denise Ann Dykeman. I am a parent, a lawyer, and a Lutheran. I am happy to have family members and friends who are transgender adults and kids – some of the most wonderful and brave people I could ever be blessed to encounter. This written testimony is presented in opposition to HB 1249, which appears to be part of a concerted, nationwide effort to target transgender youth for unequal treatment.

The transgender youth I've met are already experiencing exclusion and feeling "different" than their peers. They need love and acceptance. All parents want the best for their kids- to have a childhood full of fun, love, laughter, supportive friends, and all of the experiences and opportunities that any other kid can have.

Transgender youth have the same needs as every North Dakotan: security, a sense of belonging, economic well-being, respect, autonomy, love, and access to appropriate health care.

Health care decisions are private and best made by transgender youth and parents together with their medical providers. The North Dakota Legislature is not a medical body and should not intervene in very personal and important health care decisions. This bill appears to be solving a problem that doesn't exist as youth, medical professionals, and parents are already in the best place to make the nuanced case-by-case personal health care decisions in the best interest of each individual considering options to help align a young person's biological sex with their gender. I'd even go so far to say that no parent or health care provider in North Dakota is going to take surgery or hormone therapy for a minor child lightly. In fact, most health insurance companies already have gender affirming care policies and safeguards in place as well. What useful purpose does this bill serve for our citizens?

In North Dakota, people believe strongly in personal freedom and many don't even want to be advised that they need to wear a mask to prevent a deadly disease from spreading. It's absurd to think that the government should involve itself in matters of personal bodily autonomy. I ask that the legislature leave these very personal decisions to individuals, families, and their doctors. Gender affirming care can be life-saving. If you don't know anyone personally who has transitioned or questioned their gender as a young person, I strongly encourage you to seek out someone who has had the experience to speak with about it. It's not something that the transgender that people I know have done on a whim.

This bill, like several others in this session, unfairly targets and discriminates against the LGBTQIA+ community. This is bad for North Dakota. Businesses, families, and individuals will not want to move to North Dakota. Good, smart, thoughtful people that are here will leave. Universities won't be able to recruit young people. Doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals, already in short supply, won't want to work here. Even proposing these discriminatory bills is painful for the LGBTQIA+ people and their families in our state. Just earlier this week, I met a young man who lost his transgender sister to suicide right here in North Dakota. I would be much more impressed with a legislature that heard and responded to the voices of mental health care providers and the LGBTQIA community cautioning that exclusionary and hateful rhetoric leads to suicide, depression, and anguish and responded with kindness, wisdom, and compassion rather than ill-founded fear and undeserving disgust.

I believe all Americans should treat one another as they would want to be treated. As part of my Lutheran faith, I learned about loving our neighbors, not discriminating against them. I understand that not everyone holds the same religious beliefs that I do, however, I do know North Dakota is about building strong communities. Discrimination has no place in North Dakota. Transgender and non-binary individuals are beloved members of our community and need compassion and inclusion, not hatred and exclusion.

All young people, and especially transgender youth, need compassion and inclusion, not hatred and exclusion. All people within the State of North Dakota deserve dignity and respect and to be valued as part of the community.

Please oppose HB 1249.

Denise Ann Dykeman
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