

Dear Chair Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee,

My testimony is in opposition to House Bill 1254. I ask that you give this bill a Do Not Pass.

This bill impacts people that I care about. As a pastor and as an active member of my community I know and care about numerous transgender and nonbinary people. Some of them are minors. It has been shown that gender-affirming treatment reduces the risk of suicide among transgender adults and youth. I will never forget the look of joy upon the face of one young person who was able to have gender-affirming surgery after their eighteenth birthday. I had known them as someone prone to anxiety and with their ability to begin to transition there was a new vibrancy in their life.

You will probably note this individual was no longer a minor when they had this surgery after they reached the age of majority. The concerns that minors will receive gender-affirming surgery is inaccurate. Gender-affirming treatment for minors usually is in the form of using the youth's chosen name, the pronouns that match their gender identity, and in some cases, puberty blockers, which are reversible.

Without the ability to receive treatment for gender dysphoria the possibility of suicide is great. Any treatment comes in tandem with psychotherapy to help the person navigate their own emotions and help them to understand the incongruence of their external sex traits and the gender that they experience internally.

This also takes medical autonomy from children and their families in consultation with their health care providers. This is a governmental overreach into individual privacy.

I fear as a pastor I will preside over the needless deaths of young people who have been told that their authentic identity is a terrible secret to be hidden. When one thinks of the ability of families to seek civil damages related to gender affirming practices, I wonder if the state legislature is prepared to defend lawsuits based on the psychological toll of this bill.

Federal policy affirms the importance of allowing families to pursue gender-affirming treatment for their children who have a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. There is no good reason for the state of North Dakota to go against this policy and the science that affirms a spectrum of gender identities.

Finally,, North Dakota will lose the promise of having hard-working, professional North Dakota families exiting the state in fear of a hostile environment. Please, let us show the extraordinary welcome that North Dakota is known for to all its citizens. Recommend a Do Not Pass on HB 1254.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state

Best regards,

Rev, Grace Morton