

Olivia Data
Testimony on HB 1254
January 24, 2023

RE: Testimony in Opposition to HB 1254

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 HB 1254.

The Youth Action Council is an organization that believes in building a future in which youth are empowered to grow, learn, and give back to their communities. But how can we ever reach this future if the youth of North Dakota are not even allowed to be true to themselves? HB 1254 is incredibly dangerous towards the children of our state, and for this reason, I encourage you to oppose it.

Recent years have seen a wave of prejudice and fear mongering towards transgender people. Yet, in truth, the idea that there is a difference between sex – something based on biology and DNA – and gender – a social construct based on the characteristics a culture associates with men or women – is a scientific and social reality, not an edgy trend¹. People who do not identify with the sex they are assigned at birth have a right to express themselves and feel safe in society just like the rest of us.

Even beyond disagreements about transgender people, it is common sense that medical decisions about minors should stay between parents and their medical providers. Denying a parent the right to make an informed decision with a doctor about what is best for their child would be gross governmental overreach. This is especially true when so many scientific studies have shown that gender affirming care can save lives. According to the National Library of Medicine, 82% of transgender people have contemplated killing themselves, and 40% of transgender people have actually attempted suicide². Among LGBTQ+ youth, those whose identities are not respected by the adults in their life are almost twice as likely to attempt suicide as those whose identities are respected³. Affirming a transgender or nonbinary child's identity can save their life. According to Scientific American, data consistently shows that transgender youth who are denied access to gender affirming care tend to have higher rates of suicidal behavior, while those with access to medical treatments are around 70% less likely to contemplate suicide⁴. Furthermore, many forms

¹ "Gender and health." *World Health Organization (WHO)*,
https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1. Accessed 18 January 2023.

² "Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors." *PubMed*,
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32345113/>. Accessed 23 January 2023.

³ "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.

⁴ Boerner, Heather. "What the Science on Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender Kids Really Shows." *Scientific American*, 12 May 2022,
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-the-science-on-gender-affirming-care-for-transgender-kids-really-shows/>. Accessed 23 January 2023.

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of gender affirming care, such as puberty blockers, are reversible and have limited negative side effects⁵.

Denying children access to gender affirming care can be a death sentence. Thus, between the limited risks of providing transgender youth with appropriate medical treatment and the severe dangers of denying access, HB 1254 is an extremely concerning bill. Many people who support it claim to want to protect children, but HB 1254 sends a message loud and clear that we would rather have the children of North Dakota be dead than transgender. I know this is not a message I would want to send to any child questioning their safety and value in our state, and I sincerely hope that the members of this committee find such an idea as abhorrent as I do.

HB 1254 will not protect children. In fact, it will endanger the mental and physical health of many children. If we continue in this path of denying transgender children access to appropriate resources, accommodations, and treatments, we will only be building a community full of intolerance and hatred. Rather than protecting and empowering the youth of North Dakota, we will be raising a generation of children who are not confident in their own worth as people and who will not have the tools to properly engage with their communities.

Please, if you value the youth of North Dakota, I urge you to vote “Do Not Pass” on HB 1254. Thank you for your time.

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⁵ “Puberty Blockers for Youth.” *Provincial Health Services Authority*, <http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/child-youth/affirmation-transition/medical-affirmation-transition/puberty-blockers-for-youth>. Accessed 23 January 2023.