

As a mother of a transgender teen in North Dakota, I strongly oppose HB 1254. Several years ago, my son was suicidal and self harming on his arms and legs to significant degree. We sought help from Sanford in a three week behavioral program for teens and that was the start of a turning point. My son was diagnosed with anxiety, depression and gender dysphoria, which is medical diagnosis defined by the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychological Association. Gender Dysphoria indicates distress or discomfort with gender identity and is a diagnosis that has specific requirements that need to be met over a period of time. My son met the criteria.

My son came out as transgender in 2021 which was very difficult for him to share with us, his surrounding family, friends and school. It was especially difficult at the beginning but over time, he has become more himself. In the past few years, we have had access to therapists at Solace Counseling, doctors and nurses at Sanford and Canopy Clinic, a therapist at Together Counseling, and an occupational therapist at mOTivate Minds. With their full support, my son has made significant progress in his transition with hormone replacement therapy. This year, he is the happiest I have seen him in a long time due to medical interventions that have aided in his progress.

With their support and all of the time and work that my son has committed in the process, he is thriving in school, a 4.0 student in Honors and dual credit college courses, graduating a year early, and receiving the highest Academic Excellence scholarship he could receive at Concordia College to start as a freshman in the fall. He is fully engaged in musical theater and choir and has a strong community of friends at school. His social anxiety dissolved to the extent that he was able to excel in a job as a server. I could not have imagined this level of confidence several years ago.

My son is so hopeful to start college in August with a fresh start being fully transitioned with gender affirming surgery (top surgery). His therapists, doctors, nurses, his parents and surrounding family all fully support him in this transition. This surgery would remove his breasts and would allow him to stop wearing binders. Binders are painful and cause cysts in his breasts. The surgery will help his comfort level physically and emotionally and will greatly impact the start of his college experience, especially with living in college dorms.

If this legislation is passed, it will not only bring his gender affirming surgery to a sharp halt, it will also remove his access to the hormone replacement therapy that has gotten him this far. I worry deeply about the damage this legislation will cause to his mental and physical health and all of the progress that has been made over the past few years to get him to a happier place where he can thrive and focus on things that teens should be focused on like academics, co-curriculars, work, and college. This legislation, if passed, will cause a significant setback and harm to his well-being.

I also believe that if this legislation moves forward, it will be in great disrespect to me as a parent fully capable of making decisions for my child, to the medical community as experts with the medical research to make diagnoses and plan treatment, but mostly, to my son, a minor

who has done everything right to get to this point and deserves access to hormone replacement therapy and gender affirming surgery to be his most authentic self as well as a thriving, contributing human in this state.

I will end with this final thought. I am born and raised in the State of North Dakota. My great grandparents on both my grandmother and grandfather's side immigrated to the state from Norway and my family had decades of being farmers in Hannaford, North Dakota. I had many summers as a child riding the combine and seeing the fruits of hard, physical work that goes into farming. I started work at a young age and had the opportunity to be a teller at Bell Bank in high school and college, and then received a job straight out of college as a financial accountant at Gate City Bank in Fargo.

I left the state to go to law school in Ohio in 2001 and that led to eighteen years of practicing as an attorney, being a faculty, chair, and dean in higher education, and a president of an education company outside of the state. During that time, I was always so incredibly proud of my North Dakota roots and the advantage they often gave me with values rooted in integrity, hard work, and intellect as well as kindness and compassion. When my husband was recruited back to this state to lead economic development in the Fargo Moorhead area, I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to raise my child in such a culture to ensure the same value system. I have begun to question that decision as I see how harmful legislation like this bill is to his mental and physical health.

Please don't support HB 1254 or any anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Please allow me to parent my child and to work with medical professionals to make the best decisions for and with him. Please allow my son to thrive as the wonderful human he is and someone who can contribute greatly to this state. Please maintain our North Dakota virtues of kindness and compassion.