

To My Fellow North Dakotans,

My name is Jessica, and I was born and raised right here in North Dakota. One of my grandfathers helped to build many of the buildings you'll see all around Bismarck. My other grandfather owned the barber shop on Main Street in Mandan for nearly forty years. As a child, I roamed around Mandan, visiting the library, getting a cookie from the bakery, and enjoying that small town feeling. A feeling of being protected, cared for, even by neighbors who didn't know me. And that is what North Dakota is to me. A place where we take care of each other, and treat each other with fairness and kindness, regardless of the other person's characteristics. Like the Good Samaritan in my Sunday school classes, I have always imagined my home state as a place that could show empathy and understanding towards everyone, even if they were different.

Fast forward to now, thirty years later, and all those beliefs I have held in my heart are being challenged by not only this legislation, but all the other agenda items of a similar nature. All these items are targeting people who are perceived as different, as "other", as "not like us." Where are the Good Samaritans now? Where is the compassion that surpasses understanding?

There are those who claim this is all about protecting children. But how much do they actually know about any of this? Have they actually talked to a parent of a trans child? Have they talked to a trans youth about their experiences, or feelings, or even the process of what they are going through?

This brings us to the testimony I am actually bringing you today-my son's. This bill is personal to me, not only as someone who loves her state and knows that this is not who we are. This bill is personal to me as the mother of a trans child. Someone who has been through this process-which was done carefully and cautiously and took years. Someone who has watched her dearly loved child struggle and fight for the simple right to be who he is. I wanted to allow him to have a chance to have his voice heard; ultimately, this decision will affect him and those like him far more than it would affect anyone else. And he deserves to be heard.

"Good day, everyone who is either hearing or reading this. I am a transgender man aged fourteen, turning fifteen in July. I attend high school as a freshman and have been taking testosterone for about 630 days as of writing this, almost two years. Contrary to some people's belief, this has not affected me negatively. In fact, my mental health has improved drastically since beginning testosterone. I'm an honour roll A student, excelling in all of my classes, and all of my teachers say I'm a pleasure to have in class. The only difference between me and the average valedictorian is that I am transgender. This poses a problem to many people- I do not cause disruptions in class, I get my work done, and I usually don't talk to many other people. Yet, I find myself harassed to some degree almost every day I come to school, to the point of not wanting to come to school despite my love of learning. For me to be taken off hormones, and for some of these other bills to pass, would mean destroying my whole life and wellbeing even though I am just a kid trying to live his life.

As for the perceived concerns, there is proven research describing that hormone replacement treatment is safe. No child is going on actual hormones until they are at least a teenager, and even then, they must go through many appointments to get hormone replacement treatment. In my case, it took two years of gender exploration, six months of speaking to a medical health professional, being diagnosed with gender dysphoria, and then another two weeks of waiting to get my first shot of testosterone. Even then, my doctor had me sign a multiple-page agreement after reading it aloud, describing the effects it would and could cause. People, and youth, are not being thrown into this blind as some may describe. All are made aware of the risks, and many of them are small risks- none of the negative effects described to me has shown in my journey. Along with that, transgender youth are not being "forced to get surgeries". In fact, I'm incapable of getting surgery until I'm sixteen, and that's with parental permission, just like plastic surgery, tattoos, or any similar body modification.

It would mean the world for me, and many other transgender youths I know, for these bills to be rejected, and more transgender-safe bills to be proposed. For some, it may mean the difference between life and death. The National Institute of Health states 'Data indicates that 82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have attempted suicide, with suicidality highest among transgender youth.' And the suicide rate isn't that high because we're transgender, it is because society refuses to accept us.

Thank you for your time, and I hope this letter persuades you to reconsider your decision."

And I hope that my son's words have given you some insight into the life of a transgender youth, and I encourage you to think long and hard about the future of our state. We have always been a state with the courage of Teddy Roosevelt and his Roughriders. A state of harmony and compassion to our neighbors, the Peace Garden state. Are we a state that allows the fear of "otherness" to betray these values? Or can we stand proud and say that hate and fear do not belong here?

Thank you for your consideration; I will be praying that you make the right decision.

Jessica R. Babin