

## **Testimony by Jacob Thomas to the House Human Services Committee hearing on HB 1298 - January 25, 2021**

Dear Committee Members:

I am Jacob Thomas, a lifelong resident of North Dakota and English Language Arts teacher working in Minot, ND. I am writing to encourage you to oppose House Bill 1298 because it needlessly targets an already vulnerable population.

In my time as a high school educator, I have been privileged to work with students of all gender identities and sexual orientations as the advisor of our school's Gender-Sexuality Alliance, a national, student-run organization whose main goal is to recognize and confront discrimination of any kind. The students who meet with me once a week are already feeling vulnerable because of peers, adults, and lawmakers like yourselves who feel the need to tell them where they are and are not allowed to express their true selves. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control, nearly one-third of high school students who identify as transgender have attempted suicide at some point in their lives. The microaggressions faced by trans students in everyday life, like being called the wrong pronouns, "dead naming" on official school documents, or *actual* aggressions, like bullying, assault, and legislators proposing a bill that, frankly, seems like a solution searching for a problem has a real and lasting effect on children already living through some of the hardest years of their lives.

In fact, based on my research, I couldn't find a single case of transgender athletes gaining an unfair advantage over competitors in the state of North Dakota. What I *could* find, though, are athletic organizations like the [NCAA \(National Collegiate Athletic Association\)](#), [IOC \(International Olympic Committee\)](#) and [USA Gymnastics](#) implementing inclusive trans athlete policies at the highest levels of competition. Furthermore, states across the country, including our neighbors South Dakota and Minnesota,

have inclusive policies in place for transgender high school athletes. Youth LGBTQ advocacy group GLSEN (Gay and Lesbian Student Education Network), in coordination with thirty other organizations and individuals has released a [“Model High School Policy”](#) for fairly and respectfully including athletes of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

The point is HB 1298, as it is currently written, is cowardly and cruel. It is ignoring that fact that the youth who would be most affected are already facing an uphill battle, are already struggling to achieve the acceptance and opportunities that every other student is entitled to under Title IX federal law. North Dakota now has the opportunity to uplift children who desperately need the help. For that reason, I encourage you all to vote no on HB 1298.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

– Jacob Thomas

Minot, ND.