

Rick Ladd, Chair
House Education Committee

March 8, 2021

Re: HB 198 – relative to an exception to the opportunity for public education without discrimination.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to HB 198 and provide the following in opposition. I am a Family Nurse Practitioner and Program Coordinator of the Pediatric and Adolescent Transgender Program at Dartmouth-Hitchcock. In that capacity, I work very closely with New Hampshire transgender youth who would be adversely affected by this legislation. I am disappointed to learn that a partisan group of New Hampshire lawmakers continue to seek ways to discriminate against a very small, and vulnerable population of children within this state. HB 198 would serve as barrier to this particular population of children and adolescents by denying them the opportunity to participate in organized sports based solely on gender identity.

The medical evidence is clear that denying transgender children the opportunity to make a full social transition is harmful. Specifically, we see an increase in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, self-harming behavior, substance use and suicide. The largest and most respected evidenced-based medical organizations across the United States agree that best outcomes are seen when transgender children are allowed to participate in all aspects of life; including participation on an organized sports team that best aligns with their gender identity. The American Academy of Pediatrics, The Pediatric Endocrine Society, The College of Osteopathic Pediatricians, The American Psychological Association, as well as American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, all support the affirmation of transgender youth at home, in schools, on sports teams and in their respective communities.

Specific to sports, I'd like to point out that the number of transgender students participating on organized teams in New Hampshire is extremely low. In fact, I am not aware of any significant issues that have resulted from allowing transgender children to participate on a sports teams in this state. However, I am very aware of the positive impact that sports can have on these children. Evidence demonstrates that kids who play sports benefit from exercise and physical fitness, team building skills, social skills and are shown to have better overall academic performance, than kids who do not participate in sports. Based on this evidence, one might conclude that denying a transgender child the opportunity to participate on a sports team would most certainly put that child in a position where they are at a disadvantage as compared to their cisgender peers. Furthermore, if there were to be an issue or concerns about safety or unfair advantage, the parties involved will look to the New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletic Association's (NHIAA) policy on transgender athletes. This policy, already set in place, provides necessary guidance for students as well as schools. *If* there were to be an isolated concern about the size, physical ability or eligibility of transgender female athlete,

there is opportunity for protest procedure with NHIAA. It seems quite unnecessary to further police this extremely small group of children when we have the NHIAA policy in place. Please find this policy attached to my written testimony.

In closing, I think it is important to note that there is only very small number of children who identify as transgender (<1%). Within that population, only a select few will seek an opportunity to play on an organized school sports team. Therefore, it seems much more sensible to allow individual schools to address potential issues by referring to the NHIAA policy on transgender student athletes. Government oversight of this small group seems quite unnecessary and frankly, nothing more than a blatant attempt to further marginalize and discriminate against transgender children. While supporters of this legislation will try to lead the public to believe that this in fact a problem, I would respond by saying this is more likely an ignorant and fear-based hypothetical that is unlikely to materialize in any significant way. I would also respond that the positive influences that sports have on this population of children far outweighs the *perceived* threat that trans kids will put others at risk, or have an unfair advantage over other student athletes.

If you are considering supporting HB 198, I respectfully request that you look to the literature and evidence, and seriously consider the negative impact that this legislation will have on some of the most vulnerable *children* in New Hampshire.

Along with this written testimony, I have included the following documents:

- New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletic Association Transgender Policy
- A statement from The American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians and Human Right's Campaign Foundation on caring for transgender children.
- A statement on the importance of an affirming approach to the care of transgender children, written by The Pediatric Endocrine Society.
- A statement from The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry on care of transgender and gender diverse youth.

Respectfully submitted,

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