



Good morning to the members of the Assembly Committee on Education. I am Abigail Swetz, my pronouns are she/her, and I am here as the executive director of Fair Wisconsin, Wisconsin's only statewide LGBTQ+ civil rights and political advocacy organization. I am also here as a former middle school teacher and a current mom. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition of Assembly Bill 103.

This bill stands to harm trans kids, their parents, and their teachers if it were to become law.

As a former teacher, I am immeasurably lucky to have known many trans kids and had the honor of watching them grow up into healthy, happy, fully-realized adults. I'm thankful to have been a part of their journey because it means I know the power of using a child's affirming name and pronouns in a deeply personal way, having seen the smiles on their faces and the way they were able to blossom in my classroom. This ability for children to thrive in such an environment is backed up by research; for example, research published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that trans youth who could use their affirming name and pronouns in all aspects of their lives (school, family, friends, and community) experienced positive mental health outcomes to the tune of a 71 percent decrease in depression and a 65 percent decrease in suicide attempts. This bill would prevent teachers and other school staff from engaging in the best practice of using the name and pronouns a child asks for, a best practice that research has shown can save lives.

Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicates that trans youth are more likely to discuss their feelings of depression and anxiety with teachers and school staff than they are with their parents or guardians. This makes it clear that we must have inclusive policies in our schools that support trans youth in seeking out the help they need, and this bill is the opposite of that inclusion. When I was a teacher, I worked alongside other school staff to help students get ready to share information about themselves with their families, and I know firsthand the need to follow the child's lead in that process. The youth themselves are the experts in their own experience and have a better understanding than anyone about the challenges they might face when it comes to safety and acceptance. I have witnessed that conversation go well, and I have heard it go badly, but either way, the children and their families knew they could turn to me and my fellow school staff when they had more questions, and that proved invaluable.

This bill also feeds into a false dichotomy being set up between parents and school staff when, in reality, the bill stands to hurt parents as they try to support their trans child. The barriers that Wisconsinites of any age already face when they want to legally change their name are numerous, and the level of documentation required by this legislation to

change a name in a school information system is onerous to the point of prohibitive. Parents must be able to support their own child and know their child's affirming name will be honored at school without it being invalidated or inaccessible due to bureaucratic red tape.

To be clear, affirming names and pronouns and safe spaces do not create trans kids. They allow them to breathe and help them grow into awesome adults this state needs. The mental health struggles that trans youth face are not a self-fulfilling prophecy. They are a societally-pressured outcome, and bills like AB 103 add to that pressure. Inclusive policies, like making it possible for students to use an affirming name and pronouns that best represent their identity in school in an easily accessible way – that is a pressure valve, and makes it possible for them to live fully and healthily.

I want to end with a message to the trans kids of Wisconsin: remember that there are so many people in this state who love you exactly as you are and exactly as you will someday become. Always know you are worthy of that love, and of your own future. We are grateful for you, and Wisconsin is a better place because you are here.

Thank you.



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