

Good morning to the members of the Senate 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 Senate Bill 120.

We can all agree that our children are our most precious resource, and that we must ensure their future is bright. That means we must do all we can to keep our kids happy, healthy, and present for learning.

The ability for children to thrive in a supportive environment is backed up by substantial research which I will provide with my written testimony; however, SB 120 would prevent teachers and other school staff from engaging in the best practice of using the name and pronouns a child asks for, a strategy that research has shown to support mental health and access to learning.

The mental health struggles that trans youth face are not a self-fulfilling prophecy. They are a societally-pressured outcome, and bills like SB 120 add to that pressure. Inclusive policies, like making it possible for students to use an affirming name and the pronouns that best represent their identity in school in an easily accessible way – those policies are a pressure valve making it possible for them to live fully and healthily.

Data from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicates that, when trans youth discuss their feelings of depression and anxiety with adults, they are more likely than their peers to turn to adults like teachers and school staff. This makes it clear that we must have inclusive policies in our schools that support trans youth in seeking out the help they need; SB 120 is the opposite of that inclusion, instead feeding into a false dichotomy being set up between parents and school staff, when all of us just want what is best for kids.

Being trans in America right now means living in a toxic, fundamentally unsafe environment. Our schools can provide our trans young people with some measure of safety and support, and thank goodness for that. But bills like SB 120 threaten that safety and support by using something as simple yet meaningful as a name to pit teachers and parents against one another, trapping the kid they love in the middle. It does not have to be this way. You can choose to stop this harmful bill here. You can choose to be a part of safety for these kids rather than a part of the threat. Vote *NO* on Senate Bill 120.

As a former teacher, I am immeasurably lucky to have known many trans and nonbinary 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; I have seen the smiles on their faces and the way they were able to really come into their own self-understanding in my classroom. I have also had the honor of helping young people navigate this conversation they wanted to have about their name and pronouns with their family.



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 acceptance and safety at home. I have witnessed that conversation go well, and I have seen it go badly, but in every instance, 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. SB 120 aims to traffic in distrust while a process like this, one that is directed by a well-supported young person, is actually how we can build trust between parents, children, and school staff.

Affirming names and pronouns help our kids grow into the awesome adults this state needs. Ensuring our kids are happy, healthy, and present for learning is how we create not only their bright futures, but also our own.

I want to end with a message to the trans and nonbinary kids of Wisconsin: remember that there are so many people in this state who love you exactly as you are and as you are becoming. 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 for listening, and for voting *NO* on Senate Bill 120.