

March 24, 2021

Dear South Dakota Legislators,

I am a pediatrician in Rapid City, SD, and I specialize in LGBT+ youth healthcare. House Bill 1217 will have a real, direct impact on my patients' lives. These children are already struggling to find support and security at school, at home, and in their community. Transgender youth do not need to face more shame and stigma. They have significantly increased rates of suicide attempts compared to their cisgender peers, with one in three transgender youth reporting that they attempted suicide in the last year. These rates are known to be directly related to the acceptance- or lack of acceptance- from their community, especially in their home life.

Make no mistake, the legitimacy of transgender people's identity is accepted by all major medical societies and institutions. When you refuse these youth access to play sports on the team to which they identify, you are discriminating against them based on their gender nonconformity and you are depriving them of opportunities that are available to their cisgender peers. I've heard supporters of this legislation say that this doesn't affect transgender girls because they can still "just play on the boys' team." However, I can assure you that being forced to play on the boys team would deeply affect trans girls and ensure that many choose not to play sports at all.

This bill would require a teen that has transitioned socially (as is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics) to come out to their peers, neighbors and teachers if they want to play sports. Although their doctors, parents and counselors are all telling them to live in their transgender identity, now their school will make that impossible. Their mental health, as well as their physical safety, is put at risk by openly identifying them and making their gender identity public knowledge. This bill thus essentially punishes them for trying to participate in sports as a transgender person.

Being forced to play on the wrong team undermines critical treatment for trans youth. When you force a transgender girl to play on the boys team or a transgender boy to play on the girls team, you are asking them to betray their identity and dignity in order to play sports. You go against what is recommended by their doctors and counselors, and you endanger their mental and physical health. You create a system that has no positive outcome for these children. They can either give up the sport they love or give up living as their true identity, but they cannot have both.

Supporting this bill communicates to trans youth that you believe they deserve to be singled out and treated differently. Cisgender youth are all born with different body types, but they are not forced to play on the boys' team if their body type is better for a sport or they are 'stronger'. Nor are they forced to play on the girls' team if they are deemed too 'weak' or 'delicate'. They play on the girls' team because they are a girl, and they play on the boys' team because they are a boy. It has nothing to do with their body type or natural ability, but is solely based on their gender. So why do we insist that transgender youth must play with a team that does not match their gender, based on what we assume is their natural ability?

When you support this bill, you tell trans kids that you refuse to truly accept their identity and that they are not who they say they are. These children need your help and support, not your hatred or apathy. We need to see that lawmakers care about all children, not just those that are cisgender.

Please allow our athletic directors to continue helping transgender youth choose how openly they want to live their identity, while still staying active in sports. The system we have in place in South Dakota is working well and will continue to work if we just stop prejudiced and unequitable bills like House Bill 1217.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Amanda Diehl, MD