



## Transformation Project

Educate. Support. Empower.

March 16, 2021

Dear Governor Noem,

We are reaching out to you today as parents of transgender and gender nonconforming children to ask you to veto House Bill 1217. We are deeply concerned about this bill because it will cause serious physical, mental, and social damage to our children by banning them from playing on sports teams that are consistent with their gender. The danger of this bill might not be apparent at first, but we hope that as a mother you can take a second to put yourself in our shoes and see House Bill 1217 through our eyes.

Each year for the past seven years we have seen our legislators bring bills targeting our children. Every year from January to March we endure and we fight this legislation aimed at pushing our children out of public life, revoking their rights to basic necessities, and denying them their very identity. Last year, it was removing the ability for our children to access necessary health care and to talk about their identity with a school counselor in a safe space. This year, it was stripping them of their right to amend their birth certificates and to be able to play sports. House Bill 1217 is the seventh attempt to take the opportunity to play sports away from our children, but it is the first that has passed in our state. The passage of this bill through the state legislature has been extremely hard for our families because we know the pain that awaits our children if this bill becomes law.

Every day we fight for our children to have a good life where they can be their true and authentic selves. This is not easy given that they are at such a heightened risk of negative health outcomes, discrimination and violence. According to The Trevor Project, transgender youth report significantly increased rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and victimization compared to their cisgender peers. Notably, in the past year, one in three transgender youth reported attempting suicide, and more than half reported a two-week period of depression. Medical professionals, counselors, and other child welfare experts agree that affirmation is the most effective way to save our children from ever having to experience these horrifying outcomes.

The most important thing that any parent can do is love their child for who they are and show them every day that they are supported. This is especially true from parents of transgender and gender nonconforming children. Research shows that transgender youth whose families support their gender identity have a 52% decrease in suicidal thoughts, a 48% decrease in suicide attempts, and significant increases in self-esteem and general health. We do our best to create a healthy and loving home environment that can provide that necessary support and affirmation, but we don't have as much control over the things they experience outside of our homes. That is why we need your help.

House Bill 1217 will hurt our children in a number of very serious ways. Excluding our children from activities like sports that affirm their sense of self contributes to their already heightened risk of depression, social isolation, self-hatred, risk of self-harm and suicidal behavior, and more. In short, it threatens our children's lives. Barring our daughters from girls' sports and forcing them to compete on boys' teams will undermine critical treatment for them and open the door to stigma, harassment, and other forms of discrimination. It also bars them from the positive outcomes that come from participation in sports such as better grades, greater homework completion, higher educational and occupational aspirations, and improved self-esteem.

This bill communicates to our children that they deserve to be singled out and treated differently. It tells our daughters that they must be feared and that other girls need protection from them. It teaches them that they must betray their identity and dignity in

order to have the same access to the same opportunities and programs as their peers. And it tells them that teaching them this lesson is so important to some of our South Dakota legislators that they are willing to risk losing hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding, lost business development, tourism revenue, and NCAA championships.

When our children ask us why this is so important to our state legislators we have no answer for them. South Dakota already maintains separate sports teams for boys and girls and has a procedure for including transgender athletes on sports teams consistent with their gender identity. There has been no evidence of any type of dominance by transgender athletes, no threat to sports, and no other problems in the almost decade since the SDHSAA policy was adopted. There are very few examples of transgender athletes even competing in South Dakota let alone dominating in sports.

Our children need affirmation and support, not to be treated as a political target. We want them to grow up believing that South Dakota is a place where they are welcome and where they can thrive. We want them to have leaders that recognize the value of their lives and stand up for them when they are under attack.

We ask you as a mother, how would you feel if your child was the target of this type of legislation? What would you do to protect your children? What will you do to protect ours? We urge you to veto House Bill 1217.

Sincerely,

SD Parents of transgender children:

Susan Williams, Sioux Falls

Diane E., Central City

Rose B., Harrisburg

Kim & Lee Bruguier, Mitchell

Amy Rambow, Watertown

Jennifer P., Vermillion

DeJae M, Sioux Falls

Kari A. Wilmes, Vermillion

Samantha V., Hartford

Ann M., Sioux Falls

Pamela Coffman, Sioux Falls

Elizabeth Weckstein, Lead

Malene A. Little, Vermillion

Kara M., Sioux Falls

Chuck C., Sioux Falls

Cyndy Bromley, Chester, SD

Lori B., Sioux Falls, SD

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Krista Wasco, Sioux Falls

Amanda S., Sioux Falls

Kim Parke, Sioux Falls

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