

**HB 6452**  
**An Act Concerning Discrimination**

My name is Dr. Laura Saunders and I have been asked by the anti-discrimination coalition to speak about concerns that have been raised in relation to gender variance in children and transgendered teachers and their impact on young children.

I am a licensed psychologist specializing in child and adolescent development and psychopathology. I have been working in this field for 19 years.

The issues of greatest concern when we discuss the impact on young children are their social, emotional and psychological health. First, we need a more clear understanding of the relevant developmental issues. Gender identity is the child's identification of himself or herself as a male or female. This means that for the great majority of children by age 3, a child's understanding of their biological sex is congruent with their internal feeling of maleness or femaleness. By age 4, gender identity is stable and, in typical development, congruent with biological sex. Multiple factors determine core gender identity including biological, genetic and experiential influences. Epidemiological studies suggest that 1/350-500 children born in the United States are gender atypical. The science and biology of gender has been well researched. One is born into one's gender. One does not chose to be one gender or another. By the time a child enters elementary school at age 5, their gender identity is more firmly secure and is not subject to undue influence by others.

There was a seminal study by GLSEN in 2005 called the National School Climate Study. Key findings include: 26.1% of students have experienced physical harassment at school due to their gender expression/variance and 11.8% have been physically assaulted. The study also found that states with inclusive anti-bullying laws and policies that have specific categories for sexual identity and gender identity have significantly lower rates of verbal harassment (31.6% vs. 40.8%). Specific anti-bullying laws may cause teachers and administrators to make a concerted effort to better protect gender variant youth.

In reviewing the literature, the academic research on transgendered teachers and their impact on children, is virtually non-existent. What exists is mostly single case studies and anecdotal stories. There is small body of research done on the children of transgendered parents. These studies conclude that children of transgendered parents are NOT negatively affected by their parent's gender dysphoria. None of the children of transgendered parents developed any characteristics of their own gender identity disorder. Thus, no child raised by a transgendered parent had any negative psychological impact. This is far greater contact and influence than a teacher would have on a student.

It can be assumed that the fear in allowing a transgendered or gender variant teacher in the classroom is that they would create anxiety and confusion in their students and, at worst, stir gender confusion or arrested gender development. There is absolutely NO scientific evidence to support this fear. Additionally, there is no evidence that children have been traumatized by exposure to gender variant adults. Atypical gender expression is not in any way contagious. It should also be noted that the transition for gender variant individuals is, in fact, a process. It does not happen over a day or weekend. It takes months and years to transition, which is more than adequate time to help others also adjust to the transition.

An age-appropriate explanation of gender variance can be easily provided for those children who are educated by transgendered teachers. Positive interactions with transgendered people increase positive attitudes, break down stereotypes and increase awareness and understanding; these interactions do not damage our children, their development or their education.

It is important to remember that children are tolerant and flexible in their thinking and can understand experiences different from their own. This only serves to enhance children's empathy and their appreciation of diversity.

Respectfully submitted,

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