

To the Members of the Committee,

My name is Teresa Elmore and I am a third-year medical student at VCU who will be applying into a Pediatrics residency come May. I am writing to you today in regards to the HB988 bill being proposed that will eliminate the requirement that public schools adhere to the model policies from the Department of Education regarding transgender students. This topic is incredibly important to me, not only because it affects the health and wellbeing of the patient population I will be treating for the rest of my career, but also because I have had the unique opportunity of working directly with transgender children during my clinical rotations. I speak from experience when I say that transgender youth are in need of more protections within schools, not less.

I don't make this statement lightly. In fact, I am shaking with emotion as I sit here trying to find the words to explain the seriousness of the repercussions this bill will have on an already vulnerable population. Research shows that transgender youth report significantly increased rates of depression, suicidality, and victimization compared to their cisgender peers. In fact, a CDC survey found that 34.6% of transgender children reported an attempted suicide in the last year. That's one in three. One in three children seeking to end their life due to lack of acceptance, discrimination, and bullying. To the healthcare community, this is an alarming cause of mortality that is completely preventable with proper interventions. Those interventions must include supporting and protecting students for the hours they attend school, regardless of the political leaning their school district adheres to.

The 2015 National School Climate Survey by GLSEN, which interviewed over 10,000 students residing in every state, found that 75% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe at school. And it's not difficult to deduce why when it was reported that two-thirds of transgender and non-binary students were verbally harassed at school (64.5%), one in four were physically harassed at school (24.9%), and one in ten were physically assaulted at school (12.0%). However, when schools adhered to, "a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy (that) is both in place and known about by students (1)," staff were up to 5 times more likely to intervene in negative remarks about gender expression and 43% fewer LGBTQ students experienced high levels of victimization based on gender expression.

Those are the numbers, but I am not here just to advocate purely based on statistics that influence public health. I am here because of the children I've cared for throughout the last year. For the 14-year-old who was beaten by his parents for being transgender but who managed to light up with excitement every time we used he/him pronouns. For the 17-year-old who could scale any rock-climbing wall with ease but refused to let go of my hand before surgery. For the 15-year-old who had the stage presence of a comedian but broke down in sobs when asked about their experience at school and recent suicide attempt. These are the children that deserve our efforts and protection, and we cannot leave it up to individual schools whether they are provided this essential support or not. These policies matter. They aren't words presented as part of a specific political agenda. They are the necessary requirements our public school system must adhere to in order to save young lives. And I have seen far too many pills swallowed and wrists slit to stand quiet on an issue regarding the health and safety of these children.

For this reason, I implore you to vote "no" on this bill that will limit protections for transgender students in our schools. Thank you for your consideration and for allowing my voice to be heard at this meeting.

Sincerely,

Teresa Elmore

1: [https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS\\_School\\_Climate\\_for\\_Transgender\\_Students\\_Data.pdf](https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_School_Climate_for_Transgender_Students_Data.pdf)