

After more than 27 years of military moves, my husband retired last year and we can now proudly declare ourselves residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia. While we are very happy here I can tell you that one of the biggest factors in our decision to retire here is the quality of public education our two children receive.

We have two pretty typical teenagers. Our oldest is a senior that loves Latin, theater, and is excited to head off to college in the fall. Our youngest is a headstrong 8th grader who struggles finding motivation in school but excels in art and is grateful to be in-person with their friends this year. Both of our amazing children identify under the transgender umbrella.

As parents we have had to educate ourselves and work very hard to understand how to best support them both as they do what we want all teenagers to do - figure out who they are and how they fit into their world. One aspect of this life adjustment that we thankfully had to worry very little about was their safety and acceptance at school.

At every turn our communication with school was met with understanding, support, and an agreement to work with us as partners in our children's education. Their counselors and administrators found ways to update their chosen names and pronouns for use in informal settings like class rosters and even yearbooks. They asked our students what would feel most comfortable and safe for them regarding restroom use and changing facilities. These accommodations were always made keeping the safety and comfort of ALL students in mind. If we expect schools to respect the identity, privacy, and safety of it's cis-gender students, then we must also demand they do the same for transgender students. It has already been established that transgender students are entitled to equal protections under federal laws as outlined, among others, in the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, Title VII of the Equal Rights Act of 1964, and Title IX. Additionally, the Virginia Values Act extends anti-discrimination rights to LGBTQ people in public spaces, such as schools.

I cannot adequately express our gratitude to the faculty and staff at Robinson Secondary School for their caring partnership and support of our children, but I can do my best to impart to you how incredibly important the model policies are to LGBTQ students. You've likely seen statistics, such as from The Trevor Project, that LGBTQ students are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their straight or cis-gender peers due largely in part to negative treatment from others, such as bullying at school. Affirming schools may be protective of suicide risk not only by providing direct identity support to LGBTQ youth but also by creating an environment where LGBTQ youth are less likely to experience bullying (*The Trevor Project's 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health*). Model policies are not just "nice" or "supportive", they are quite literally life-saving. As a volunteer

Trevor Project Crisis Counselor and a parent of a transgender teen that struggles with depression, I can tell you this is true beyond a doubt.

Virginia is amazing. It is a place where every student should be offered an education that is not only the highest quality, but safe and affirming for all students. I've seen Virginia be this place for my children. Please help it stay this way, for the benefit of not only our students but our future.

Please do not advance HB988/SB20.

Thank you,
Christina McCormick
Fairfax Station, VA