

February 23, 2022

Madame Chair Darling and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for taking the time to read about what happened to me, which has caused me to believe that Wisconsin needs Senate Bill 962, a Parent Bill of Rights to protect parents against school districts across the state.

During the 2020-2021 school year, my 12-year-old daughter attended 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Kettle Moraine Middle School. As much as I would like to say that she was looking forward to a new school, she was struggling mentally due to the isolation from online learning during her 5<sup>th</sup> grade year and her fear of entering middle school. Shortly after school started, she asked if I could find her a therapist to talk about the anxiety and depression she was having. After several attempts to find therapists in the area, I found that there were waiting lists for up to two months due to the increase in need during the pandemic. I then reached out to the school counselor to make the school aware of what was going on with her and to see if they knew of any therapist in the area that might have openings.

While waiting for additional information from the school about available therapy, things got much worse. One mid-December evening my daughter asked to go to inpatient care. She said she was struggling with wanting to end her life and that she wasn't sure she was a girl. I told her that I would call right away in the morning and asked if she wanted to tell me why she didn't feel like a girl. She said that she didn't know, but that a teachers aid at school told her that if she wanted to change her name and pronouns at school she only needed to go to the office and fill out some paperwork. My daughter said that she didn't want to do that without me knowing, and the aid told her to go home and discuss it with me.

The next day I admitted her to a mental health facility where she remained inpatient for 8 days and in an intensive outpatient program for a month. During this time, I reached out to the school about my frustration with the lack of communication from them and to find out why school staff was telling her she could change her name and pronouns without me being involved. I then reached out to the counselor and informed her what was going on with my daughter and to have health information released to the school from the mental health facility.

Once released from inpatient care, she insisted she was a boy and decided on a new name. We discussed this as a family and decided to learn more about gender dysphoria before making a decision about a transition at school. While we were learning more about this, my daughter reached out to the staff and let them know of her wishes.

During the four weeks of researching, I learned a lot that raised concerns for my daughter's overall health, while both the school and the mental health professionals were telling me that social transition is not a big thing. Research and opinions from far more credible sources who have been practicing in the field said something completely different. It could have long term consequences should this not be the right decision for her. Because my daughter experienced Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria, not having any history struggling with her gender, allowing a social transition could hurt more than help her in healing her mental health struggles. After doing research, I informed the school that I wanted staff to refer to my daughter with her birth name and female pronouns. I let both the principle and counselor know that my family would address my daughter's mental health and keep them in the loop, but we

were choosing not to follow the affirmative care model. The principle then informed me that there were staff members that were in support of the change and wanted to honor my daughter's wishes. I let him know that while I appreciated that, my expectation was that all staff would follow the medical treatment her parents have chosen. But the principal informed me that the district's policy was to follow the wishes of my minor child, rather than her parents. I informed the principle she would no longer be attending the district if they refused to follow the approach we chose for our daughter.

I also decided to remove social pressures on this topic. I took all social media away for a time, while finding her a therapist that would be willing to address her underlying comorbidities of depression, anxiety, low self-worth, and feelings to cause harm to herself. In the three weeks of being removed from social media and the district, her demeanor completely changed. She shared with me that the practice of affirmative care "really messed her up." She was told that because I was questioning her choices, I was not a loving parent but rather an obstacle for her to overcome in her transgender journey. The school further enforced this in her mind because they were willing to dismiss the medical care I wanted for my child and go with the affirmative care model being practiced by some today. Since the whole ordeal, we found my daughter a therapist that works with her on her underlying issues and she is now comfortable in her birth sex and has not felt a need to change her name or pronouns.

Had the Parents Bill of Rights already been passed in Wisconsin when I was experiencing this in the Kettle Moraine School District, the medical treatment of my child would not have been challenged by my school district, she would still be attending the school district she was in since 5K, and my family would have more confidence in the current public education system.

*Testimony submitted by anonymous Wisconsin parent and Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty client*