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Law Amendments Committee

Re: Bill 140

I am writing this letter in support of the amendment to add gender identity and expression to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. The Youth Project is an organization that works with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, 25 and under, across Nova Scotia. While we have made many great strides and accomplishments in making Nova Scotia a safer, healthier and happier place for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, transgender youth have been left behind. The stated protection of gender identity and expression in our provincial Human Rights Acts would send a clear and powerful message that Nova Scotia does not want to leave our transgender population behind.

Often with Human Rights conversations we talk about the protection of individuals with respect to employment. While this is an extremely important area to provide protection, we tend to focus on the issues affecting transgender adults. I would like to address the challenges faced by transgender children and youth and how this amendment to the Human Rights Act would benefit them. While many transgender children and youth are affected by employment and housing either directly or indirectly, they are almost certainly affected by education. This amendment would go a long way in helping provide our education system with some direction and support in creating and maintaining safer and more inclusive schools for our transgender learners.

We have transgender children and youth in our schools who are struggling to have their identities recognized, celebrated and respected. They face daily challenges with gendered spaces such as washrooms, locker rooms, physical education, sports teams, and school records that classify them by their sex and ignore their gender identity. This often causes anxiety and depression and makes school a place to survive and not a place to learn. Often they are mistaken for being lesbian, gay or bisexual and receive inadequate or misdirected support. There are no policies or curriculum in place addressing transgender children and youth. Leadership from the government of Nova Scotia can go a long way to providing schools and school boards with the support and confidence to move forward in providing protections for transgender students.

Amending the Human Rights Act to include gender identity and expression sends a strong message of support from the government of Nova Scotia to our departments, institutions and public systems that our province cares about its transgender population. It goes beyond providing legal protection to individuals. It gives transgender Nova Scotians visibility, recognition, and respect. It will help to raise awareness about transgender issues. It will help our leaders support and maintain fair and equitable policies and practice that includes and embraces transgender people. It will make Nova Scotia a leader

in human rights protection joining Ontario, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories allowing other provinces to follow.

Most importantly, to us here and the Youth Project, this amendment will allow transgender children and youth to grow up in a province that recognizes their existence, provides protection for their future, and includes them as valuable residents of this province. While we still have a ways to go to eliminate transphobia and secure equitable and adequate care for our transgender population, this is an amazing and important step that will help change Nova Scotia for the better. It will help lay the groundwork to positive and welcomed change. Those who are born today will grow up in a province that lists gender identity and expression as protected a human rights classification. They are already further ahead. They are already on their way to being learners, not survivors.

We hope that you think of the value of our children and youth as we move forward. This amendment will go a long way to improving the safety, health, and happiness of our youngest transgender citizens. Thank you for your diligence and support of this bill and your commitment to a better Nova Scotia.



Leighann Wichman
Executive Director
The Youth Project