



Testimony of Vajra Ma, Chair, Women's Human Rights Campaign USA

Before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Committee on Education
On House Bill No. 847

OPPOSE

March 29, 2021

Thank you, members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Committee on Education, for allowing me the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to House Bill No. 847.

The Women's Human Rights Campaign (WHRC) is a global nonpartisan group of volunteer women dedicated to protecting women's sex-based rights. Our volunteers include academics, writers, organizers, activists, lawyers, and health practitioners. [The Declaration on Women's Sex Based Rights](#) ("The Declaration") was created by the founders of WHRC to lobby nations to maintain language protecting women and girls on the basis of sex rather than "gender" or "gender identity." The Declaration re-affirms women and girls' sex-based rights and challenges the discrimination we experience from the replacement of the category of sex with that of "gender identity."

I am the chair of WHRC USA, the U.S. chapter of WHRC. My interest in the legislation before the House of Representatives Committee on Education today, House Bill No. 847, is based upon Article 9 of The Declaration, "Reaffirming the need for the protection of the rights of the child." This is in keeping with Article 3 (1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states, "In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

The Declaration states, in Article 9 (i), that state funding should not be used "to promote sex stereotyping and the concept of 'gender identity' in educational institutions, as this constitutes the promotion of discrimination against women and girls." This is in keeping with Article 29 (d) of the UNCRC, which states that "the education of the child shall be directed to [t]he preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes..."

Sex is defined by the United Nations as “the physical and biological characteristics that distinguish males from females.” (Gender Equality Glossary, UN Women). The Declaration supports this well-established definition of "sex." Further, it has long been understood in the area of human rights that “gender” (that is, the sex-role stereotyping of men and women) is a fundamental aspect of women’s and girls’ inequality and must be eliminated.

House Bill No. 847 would require that schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provide instruction that includes “respect for and awareness of” a variety of concepts, including so-called “gender identities.” Requiring that teachers instruct students in “respect for and awareness of” sex-role stereotyping as the basis of a so-called “identity” is in direct conflict with both the Declaration and the UNCRC, because sex-role stereotyping can never be the basis for equality of the sexes, and inherently constitutes discrimination against women and girls.

I am further concerned that inclusion of “respect for and awareness of” sex-role stereotyping as the basis of a so-called “identity” in a school curriculum will encourage the belief that some children may have been “born in the wrong bodies” because their behavior and interests do not conform to the stereotyped presentations and behaviors associated with and enforced on the basis of their sex. WHRC USA condemns the concept that any child was “born in the wrong body” in the strongest terms, and Article 9 (j) of the Declaration notes that identifying any child in this manner may lead to medical interventions that “result in sterilization or other permanent harms.”

Because the inclusion of “gender identities” as a concept schools would be required to promote to children constitutes the promotion of discrimination against girls and women, and because the ideology of “gender” as the basis for protection of a so-called “identity” is detrimental to all children, WHRC USA strongly opposes House Bill No. 847.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vajra Ma". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each name being significantly larger and more stylized.

Vajra Ma
Chair, Women’s Human Right Campaign USA