

Exhibit 11

Declaration of Alyson Telford

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA**

IOWA SAFE SCHOOLS f/k/a GLBT YOUTH IN IOWA
SCHOOLS TASK FORCE, et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

KIM REYNOLDS, in her official capacity as Governor of
the State of Iowa, et al.,

Defendants.

Case No. 4:23-cv-474

**DECLARATION OF
ALYSON TELFORD**

COMES NOW, Alyson Telford, and pursuant to 28 U.S.C §1746, declares under penalty of perjury that the following is true and correct:

1. My name is Alyson Telford. I am over 18 years old. I have personal knowledge of the facts as stated herein.
2. I am a teacher in the Norwalk Community School District.
3. I hold a standard license issued by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) with endorsements in K-6 Teacher Elementary Classroom, K-8 Middle School Language Arts, and 5-8 Middle School Social Studies.
4. This is my 11th year as a teacher.
5. I currently teach seventh grade English Language Arts in a middle school that includes students in grades sixth through eighth.
6. Middle school is a tough transition for many students. They are going through a transformative time in their lives. It is a time of self-discovery. Students start to gain more independence as they dive into extra-curricular sports and hobbies, find new social groups of peers that may be similar or different from themselves, and navigate their growing understanding of the ever-changing world and society around them. One of the many things I have discovered in my

eleven years of teaching middle schoolers is that above all else, they want acceptance: Acceptance from peers, from family, from teachers, from coaches, but especially from themselves. While their bodies and minds are undergoing significant changes, they are looking to make sense of the world and their place in it. They are social, emotional, curious, and often insecure. They seek out connections and are able to open up and feel comfortable when they feel seen and valued.

7. This is why I go to such lengths to ensure that every student in my classroom feels welcomed and included. I want my students to know they can trust me.

8. SF 496 appears purpose-built to destroy that trust.

9. First, there is the provision that says I will be disciplined and my school sanctioned if I provide a sixth grader in my school with any “program, curriculum, test, survey, questionnaire, promotion, or instruction relating to gender identity or sexual orientation.” My classroom time is spent primarily with seventh graders, but I often interact with the sixth graders in the building, too.

10. For example, I used to co-sponsor a gender and sexuality alliance (a “GSA”). This was open to any student in the school and was of considerable importance for students—sixth, seventh, and eighth graders – who identified as LGBTQ+ themselves or who had friends or family in the LGBTQ+ community.

11. While the group had stopped meeting before SF 496 went into effect for unrelated reasons, it feels more important now than ever before that it exists. When I originally inquired about restarting it, I was told by my administration that it may violate the prohibition as a “program” or “promotion” relating to gender identity. They mentioned that putting posters in the halls to inform students of this club's existence may also be against the law due to “promotion”. I had to choose between putting my own licensure at risk by sponsoring the group, or refusing to facilitate a student experience that I know has great benefits.

12. I can recall many times where that group was a hugely positive influence in a student's life, as they were able to find community and a safe space to talk about their own journey in understanding their sexual orientation or gender identity, or to discuss how their friends or members of their family had been impacted by their own journeys.

13. I had a student who discussed how they had been teased for having two dads, and how other students had asked if they were gay too because of it.

14. I had a student share that their mother had cut off communication with their sibling after finding out that they were in a same-sex relationship, and the student was terrified that her mom would kick her out if she found out that she also had crushes on other girls.

15. Hosting the GSA also allowed me, as an adult facilitating these discussions, to steer students away from potentially unsafe behavior. However, now this would raise another provision of SF 496 that puts my licensure and my students' safety at risk: the provision requiring me to report on any student who "requests an accommodation that is intended to affirm the student's gender identity."

16. For example, a student in the GSA several years ago confided in me that he had been binding his chest with duct tape, because he did not own a compression binder and did not know how to ask his parents for help. Binding with duct tape can cause serious skin damage, but it was what this student chose to do because he was scared of his parents' reaction.

17. The people in favor of SF 496 seem to think teachers want to hide information like this from parents. This is not true at all. In this particular instance, I spoke with this student privately; I explained the risks of what he was doing, and I encouraged him to speak with his parents while giving him the guidance and confidence he needed to do so. After talking through

some strategies, he went home and did speak with his parents, on his own, and his parents showed their acceptance by helping him get a compression binder.

18. If this was a sixth grader who came to me while SF 496 was in effect, I could be prohibited from engaging with him on this issue relating to gender identity and, worse, I could be obligated to report him to his parents before he was ready, forcing a confrontation on the issue with potentially devastating consequences.

19. It is the constant state of not knowing what the rules are and are not that causes me the most frustration. It seems as if everyone has a different understanding of the law as written, and therefore I have heard many opposing interpretations.

20. When it comes to the prohibition on gender identity and sexual orientation, will I be subject to discipline if a sixth grader comes into my room and asks about the pride flag hanging on my wall or the Iowa Safe Schools sticker on my door?

21. What if the younger sibling of a student I have in class borrows a book that one of my students had checked out from me? I have established a classroom library with over 1,700 books. These books used to be available to any student who wanted them, regardless of their grade or if they were in my class. It is a diverse collection, and among it are books relating to gender identity and sexual orientation. Students come to my library because they know they will see themselves represented in the books I have.

22. When students can read about a character facing similar situations as themselves, they feel less alone. They recognize that other people “get them”. It gives them a new perspective and self-assurance. Also, it helps students grow emotionally to begin to empathize with other people as well.

23. In fact, I have had students from outside of my class come to me and ask if it was true I had books with LGBTQ+ characters. They were overjoyed when I was able to find books with characters that specifically matched the identity in which they presented themselves—books with characters like them.

24. Senate File 496 has been enforced differently in many school districts across Iowa. It is unfair and discriminatory to censor the lives of some of our students and their families from school libraries and classroom library collections. To say that a book is not “age-appropriate” due to the existence of a non-heteronormative relationship, for example, is to tell some of our students that their families are inappropriate too. It tells them that heteronormativity is the only acceptable way of living.

25. To say that a book is not “age-appropriate” due to the existence of a non-consensual sexual encounter is to say that victims of sexual assault should be silenced. That this topic is too “taboo” to be discussed.

26. At what point do I cross the line of this law? Can I have books addressing these topics on the shelf, but not guide students to them? Can I recommend titles, but not explain the plot? Can I highlight books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes for pride month with a special display? Will I be in trouble if a student borrows a book from me, and then shares it with a younger sibling or friend?

27. I used to run a monthly book club where we read books that featured characters and experiences that are historically underrepresented in literature. We read books like *The Pants Project* by Cat Clarke about a closeted trans boy who is uncomfortable with his school’s dress code forcing him to wear a skirt, *Maybe He Just Likes You* by Barbara Dee about a girl who is dealing with sexual harassment in middle school in the form of a group of boys making a game

out of giving her unwanted hugs and touching her sweater, eventually leading to pinching her butt, and *Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World* by Ashley Herring Blake about a young girl who is struggling with her place in the family after she has new baby siblings, a tornado ruins her family's home, and she is developing a crush on a girl at her school all at the same time.

28. Each of these books sparked lengthy discussions where students related to the characters' experiences and found comfort in learning they weren't alone. Students talked about how they would be uncomfortable being forced into dresses or skirts regardless of their gender identity. They talked about moments they were didn't like the way a peer had hugged them without consent and ways they could deal with that in the future. They talked about what a first crush felt like, and how much harder it would be if they didn't know who to confide in about it.

29. These are all real experiences that today's middle schoolers deal with on a daily basis, yet each of these books could be challenged due to this law. In fact, two of them were on Norwalk Community School District's original list for removal from school and classroom library shelves.

30. The provision on reporting requests for affirmation is also terrifying to me.

31. SF 496 makes clear that I am not allowed to take the student's wishes or my own knowledge of their home situation into account when determining whether they must be reported. I have no doubt this has had and will continue to have tragic consequences for some students. I go to enormous lengths to be a person of trust in my students' lives. This law penalizes me, and consequently, those students, for establishing that relationship.

32. I personally grew up with parents who were vocally against LGBTQ+ issues and would make fun of individuals in the community. Little did they know, I am bisexual myself. When I eventually came out to my parents in my twenties, it led to rude comments, a lack of

understanding, and an admission that if I would have told them when I was a child, that I would not have been accepted in their home.

33. I know that some of my students have parents who share similar views to mine.

34. Because many teachers do not want to forcibly out a student, this law encourages educators to wall themselves off from their students' lives and struggles, not wanting to know something that will force us to possibly hurt them.

35. Some school districts have interpreted this provision broadly and require reports for things as benign as nicknames. Others believe it is narrower and say the reporting obligation is not triggered unless and until a student says expressly that they are transgender and would like to be referred to by a name traditionally coded as of the opposite gender from the name on their school registration.

36. But whether the educator is in one of those school districts or the other, there is a substantial amount of student expression that falls in between these extremes. Students may change their clothing style. They may grow or cut their hair. They may express a desire to join the football or volleyball team. They may come to me and say that they are not sure what pronoun feels right for them, and that they don't know if their parents will be ok with it. Or I may learn a student is privately taking actions to affirm their gender identity, such as binding, but it may not require any action by me or the school to "accommodate" it. If I listen to them, if I recommend they talk with the school guidance counselor, if I ask about how they think their families will react, have I now put my licensure at risk because of not immediately reporting the student to my principal in violation of the law?

37. The vagueness of these provisions means many educators don't know what is forbidden and what is allowed. Right now, we just have to take the risk. I should not have to gamble with my career to protect my students.

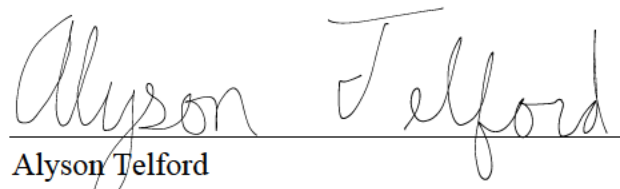
38. My identity is not inappropriate. My students' lives, questions, and families are not inappropriate. The world is a wonderful, diverse place and everyone deserves to be represented and supported as such.

39. As a classroom educator, I will continue to advocate in the best interests of all students, and I will continue to help all students recognize their worth.

I swear under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Dated this 17 day of October, 2024, at Des Moines, Iowa.

Respectfully Submitted,


Alyson Telford