

Statement of Gavin Grimm, Plaintiff in *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board*, for “Civil Rights Under the Trump Administration – The First 100 Days” Forum

April 6, 2017

Congressman Conyers, thank you for inviting me to be here today. My name is Gavin Grimm. I am a senior at Gloucester High School in Virginia.

At the end of my freshman year, I got the courage to tell my parents something that I had known for a long time. I told them that I am transgender and that I am a boy. They had nothing but love and support for me.

By the time school started, I had transitioned and was finally living as my true self. I had legally changed my name, I was poised to start hormone therapy, and I had a letter from my health care providers stating that I should be treated the same as any other boy. Before school began, my mother and I met with the school administration, telling them who I was and asking them to respect my male gender identity. They assured me that teachers and administrators would call me Gavin, and use male pronouns when referring to me, and if anyone gave me any kind of trouble, it would be resolved right away.

However, I was still anxious. I come from a fairly conservative community, and I wasn't sure that I'd be accepted for who I am. Because of this anxiety, I did not ask permission to use the boys' restroom. I was afraid of potential harassment and wanted to take things slowly, so I used the restroom in the nurse's office.

However, the nurse's office was far away from my classrooms that year. It took far too much time each day, trekking back and forth, just to use the restroom. So I approached the administration again. This time, I asked to use the bathrooms that correspond to my gender identity. My principal told me that I was free to use the boys' restrooms, and I did. I used the bathroom and left, just like any other student. Not once did an altercation occur in the restrooms. Having my gender identity be respected by my school during this period gave me confidence that I would be able to live out a normal school year, unencumbered by restroom politics.

This was, unfortunately, a false sense of security. After this seven-week period, the school board held a meeting – a public conversation about my genitals and restroom usage – without even notifying me or my family. My mother and I found out by chance less than 24 hours before the meeting was to happen. An old friend of my mother's had noticed a post going around Facebook, a rallying cry by adults in my community urging people to show up to the meeting in order to “keep that girl out of the boy's room.”

I went to that meeting in November 2014, and spoke about why it was important to me – as a boy – to live life like other boys do, including being able to use the boys' bathroom at my school. Family and a few close friends stood by me, but nothing could have prepared me for what was to

come. People speaking out against me made a point of referring to me with female honorifics and pronouns. They warned me that I was going to be raped or otherwise abused. They suggested that boys would sneak into the girls' room and harm their children. At a second meeting, a month later, the rhetoric was even more inflammatory. Word had spread throughout the community, and people turned up in droves. After each frenzied remark, clapping and hollering reverberated throughout the room. I sat while people called me a freak. I sat while my community got together to banish a child from public life for the crime of harming no one. I sat while my school board voted to banish me to retrofitted broom closets or the nurse's room.

And then it was over. At least it felt like it, back then. I was back to being exiled. My school board had invalidated me in perhaps the most humiliating way possible.

But two years later – two crazy, stressful, busy, breathtaking, rewarding, beautiful, fantastic years later – I stand stronger and prouder than ever. I stand not only with my family and friends, but with millions of supporters who stand with me. I stand with so many wonderful people at the ACLU that I proudly call family.

My case will not be resolved until after I graduate. But this fight is bigger than me. I came to realize that very early on, and it is truer now than it ever has been. This fight is for other trans youth in my high school. It for other trans youth in Virginia. It for all trans youth who are in school or one day will be. It is for the friends and loved ones of these youth, who want these children to be happy and healthy, rather than at risk and in danger as so many trans people are.

It is for these reasons that I was so disappointed earlier this year when the Trump administration withdrew critically important guidance to schools throughout the nation regarding the civil rights of trans students. When this guidance was issued in 2016, it gave hope to trans students and their families.

The guidance had a very simple message: treat trans students with dignity and respect them for who they are. Treating trans students with dignity and respect should not be controversial. The decision to withdraw the guidance sent a terrible message to some of the most vulnerable people that President Trump – the leader of our country – and his administration do not care about protecting you from discrimination.

Earlier this year, the White House announced that “President Trump continues to be respect and supportive of LGBTQ rights, just as he was throughout the election.” But actions speak far louder than words, and the message sent with this action could not have been more damaging for trans youth.

On the night the Trump administration withdrew this guidance, I stood with hundreds outside the White House to speak out against this action. While we stood there, in both anger and heartbreak, I was nonetheless inspired by the tremendous outpouring of support for trans students. Signs saying “Protect Trans Kids” and “I Stand With Trans Students” where

everywhere. Actions do speak louder than words, and the message that night was clear: regardless of what obstacles come before me and other trans students, regardless of what hatred or ignorance or discrimination we face, we will be fine because we have love on our side. That is something that even the withdrawing of the guidance cannot change.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak today. I look forward to answering any of your questions.