

My name is Cameron LaFortune, I am a resident of Baltimore County, and I am urging a favorable decision on SB761.

I am confident that you'll have a great deal of testimony directly from trans people and from experts as to the exact statistics about violence against trans people in prison, and about how the trans community is often criminalized, making the improper housing of trans prisoners a serious issue. Their voices and expertise should be enough to warrant a favorable decision. However, I know that too often the voices of cis people like myself are given weight when it comes to trans issues, and so I wanted to at least give you a view into how one cis person views the question of housing trans prisoners according to their gender.

It seems to me that the primary concerns that people might feel about housing trans prisoners, and if we are being frank, these concerns are almost exclusive to the idea of housing trans women in female prisons, is that any trans prisoners represent a unique threat to the other inmates. This has been the general gist of the argument surrounding the U.K.s recent decision to rescind these protections from their trans inmates. [1]

While I appreciate these concerns, it is notable to me that these concerns only arise when the prisoner in question is trans. We do not question whether a cis female prisoner convicted of assaulting women ought to be housed among men; it is obvious to us that even though that prisoner may have be a demonstrable risk to their fellow prisoners, we do not question for an instant if their gender should be called into question. It is ONLY trans prisoners who face the possibility of this discrimination, despite there being no reason to believe that trans prisoners present any special threat to cis prisoners.

Indeed, we also seem to only be concerned with harm when it affects non-trans prisoners. The idea that imprisoning a trans prisoner in the prison of the opposite gender is likely to lead to them being assaulted, killed, or committing suicide, as I'm sure others will testify to. Yet this is not, apparently, noteworthy to any of the publications promoting this form of discrimination. The very likely harm that trans prisoners will suffer from such decisions is brushed off as "wanting to have liberal, sensitive, tolerant approaches" (paraphrasing), whereas the hypothetical harm done to cis prisoners is a matter of "safety". The safety of trans prisoners is, apparently, immaterial to those who do not wish to house trans prisoners according to their gender.

I want to note, I am not in favor of prisons in general, but I note that many of the concerns about prisoner safety come from voices who otherwise would never take an interest in prisoner welfare. We, as a society, do not question housing violent prisoners among other prisoners, or accept it as a trivial fact, or necessity of the prison system, unless the violent offender in question is trans. Then we have objections about the housing of violent prisoners! And yet even then, we do not debate the idea of separating violent prisoners, but rather we suggest that trans prisoners specifically and exclusively should be housed improperly according to their gender. Again, to be frank, it is obvious to me that these concerns are mere crocodile tears to justify mistreating trans people whenever possible, and to deny trans people fair treatment whenever possible.

What always underpins these arguments is the question of whether or not trans people are their

'preferred' genders, or as I believe it should be phrased, "whether or not trans people exist." I phrase it this way because it highlights the real discrepancy of views and honors the actual existence of trans people. Opponents of housing trans prisoners according to their gender do so because they do not believe they are really trans. They think that being trans is a preference, or as we have increasingly seen it framed, an ideology. To the opponents of this bill, there are no trans people, not really, because it is not possible for ones gender not to conform with ones body.

And if I can speak directly to the members of the committee who believe that, it is an act of cowardice. I won't mince words for the sake of their egos. It is a refusal to engage in introspection, so strong that they would prefer to inflict physical harm, even death, on others rather than engage in it. Because if trans people exist then all of us, every cis person, has to confront the idea that their gender is not as set in stone as they may have believed it to be. Almost all of us will come to realize that, just as Newton's physics did not change how we experienced the world, accepting trans people exist does not change how we feel or who we are. But there are some too terrified to let go of the rock of their current understanding to discover they can swim without it.

That is my perspective, as a cis man. Hopefully it is enough to convince you that cis people do care about trans rights, that the need for trans rights is obvious to anyone, and that the acceptance of trans rights is not something exclusive to radical thinkers, but is obvious to any of us who have had the pleasure to know trans people.

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/feb/26/transgender-women-male-genitalia-banned-from-womens-prisons>