

**First Session – Forty-Third Legislature**  
**of the**  
**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**  
**Standing Committee**  
**on**  
**Social and Economic Development**

*Chairperson*  
*Mr. Tyler Blashko*  
*Constituency of Lagimodière*

**Vol. LXXVIII No. 6 - 6 p.m., Tuesday, May 21, 2024**

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Third Legislature**

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**  
**THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Tuesday, May 21, 2024**

**TIME – 6 p.m.**

**LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba**

**CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson)**

**ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4**

*Members of the committee present:*

*Mr. Blashko, MLA Chen, Mrs. Cook,  
MLAs Dela Cruz, Lagassé, Moroz*

*Substitutions:*

*MLA Chen for Mr. Oxenham  
Mr. Oxenham for MLA Chen at 6:14 p.m.*

**APPEARING:**

*Hon. Nahanni Fontaine, MLA for St. Johns  
Jeff Bereza, MLA for Portage la Prairie*

**PUBLIC PRESENTERS:**

*Bill 208 – The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day  
of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks  
and Months Act Amended)*

*Adam Donaghy, private citizen*

*Mikayla Hunter, private citizen*

*Luca Gheorghica, private citizen*

*Alex Rana, Manitoba 2SLGBTQIA+ Student  
Action Coalition*

*Jackson Unger, private citizen*

*Reece Malone, private citizen*

*Charlotte Nolin, 2Spirit Manitoba Inc.*

*Kai Solomon, private citizen*

*Kristie Schertzer, private citizen*

*Jude Yallowega, private citizen*

*Dieth de Leon, Bahaghari Pride Manitoba*

*Kristine Barr, Canadian Union of Public Employees*

*Caleb Clay, private citizen*

*Davey Cole, Sunshine House*

*Ashley Gawne, Clinic Community Health*

**WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:**

*Bill 208 – The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day  
of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks  
and Months Act Amended)*

*Aimee Rice, private citizen*

*Chris Allinotte, private citizen*

*Sara Tarrant, private citizen*

*Abiola Agbayewa, private citizen*

**MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:**

*Bill 208 – The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day  
of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks  
and Months Act Amended)*

*Bill 212 – The Asian Heritage Month Act  
(Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act  
Amended)*

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**The Vice-Chairperson:** Good evening, everybody. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to order.

**Committee Substitutions**

**The Vice-Chairperson:** I would like to inform the committee that under our rule 85(2), the following membership substitution has been made for this committee effective immediately: MLA Chen for Mr. Oxenham.

\* \* \*

**The Vice-Chairperson:** Before the committee can proceed with business before it, it must elect a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

**MLA Mike Moroz (River Heights):** I'd like to nominate MLA Blashko.

**The Vice-Chairperson:** MLA Blashko has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Blashko, please take the Chair.

*The Chairperson in the Chair*

**The Chairperson:** Before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a—sorry—before proceeding with the business before the committee, I wanted to make everyone aware that this evening that we have staff collecting footage for the Assembly's educational video series Inside the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

Our camera operator has permission from the Speaker to collect a variety of angles, and so will be moving around the room. As a reminder to all those here this evening, no other photography or video is allowed in the committee room.

Thank you for your co-operation.

This meeting has been called to consider the following bills: Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended); and Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks, and Months Act Amended).

I would like to—

**MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond):** Honourable Chairperson, could you see if it is the will of the committee to proceed to clause by clause of Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act, before hearing public presenters to Bill 208?

**The Chairperson:** Is there leave of the committee to proceed to clause by clause of Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act, before hearing public presenters to Bill 208? *[Agreed]*

#### **Bill 212—The Asian Heritage Month Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)**

**The Chairperson:** We will now begin clause by clause of Bill 212, The Asian Heritage Month Act.

Does the bill's sponsor, the honourable member for Fort Richmond, have an opening statement?

**MLA Jennifer Chen (Fort Richmond):** Honourable Chairperson and my colleagues, as the first Chinese Canadian MLA in Manitoba's history, it gives me great pride to speak to The Asian Heritage Month Act at this committee.

This new commemorative legislation will follow suit with the federal recognition of nearly 150 years of Asian Canadian contributions to our province right up to today. Asian settlements in Manitoba began at the same time that Manitoba joined the confederation in

the 1870s, with railroad workers from China literally building the connections that made Manitoba thrive.

Since those early days, Asians from across the continent have joined our community here in Manitoba. Our province has welcomed the people from all corners of Asia with a wealth of contributions that spans every sector our great province is built upon.

Whether from east Asia, southeast Asia, south Asia, the Middle East, or more, people of Asian descent have helped build this province and proudly continue to do so.

For many Manitobans of Asian descent the road to settlement in Manitoba has not been an easy one. In the early days our ancestors faced discrimination at every turn: whether the Chinese exclusion act; the interment camps for Japanese Canadians; the Komagata Maru incident of 1914 that hundreds of Punjabis were denied entry into Canada and forced to stay on the ship for two months in harsh conditions; or the Islamophobia faced by many in the early 2000s and even now.

Many Manitobans of Asian origins have also been forced to flee conflict and came here to build a better home and life for themselves and their children, whether as refugees from Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia in the 1970s, or from the Middle East in recent years.

The road has been long and challenging for many, but is important on the journey to establishing a stable foundation and the welcoming home base.

It is worth noting that nearly every single community in Manitoba has Manitobans of Asian descent, meaning that the impact of this legislation will be felt far and wide.

This act serves not only to recognize past contributions and struggles amid adversity but to unite us all together in our shared stance of what it means to be both Manitobans and of Asian origin.

This act will also help us share our love for culture, faith, language and family with the broader community.

\* (18:10)

As a former school trustee and a mom, I know that by proclaiming The Asian Heritage Month Act, we will leave a path for our future generations to continue to learn about their heritage and those who came before us and celebrate all the accomplishments Asian Canadians in Manitoba have achieved and continued to achieve.

Officially recognizing Asian heritage month will empower and encourage Manitobans to participate in acts of remembrance, celebrate diverse cultural festivals and ceremonies and promote cultural education in our communities. Communities will be motivated and incentivized to embrace their identity whilst sharing their unique Manitoban experience of home.

At the start of this month we had welcomed members of the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba to the Legislature to launch the 2024 Asian Heritage Month celebrations. The Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba, founded in 2002, has worked tirelessly for 22 years to bring Manitobans of Asian descent together to celebrate and learn together. They have included presidents, like the esteemed Art Miki, a former Canadian citizenship judge who was integral to ensuring that Japanese Canadians in interment camps received redress; Ms. Yenny Trinh, the first female Vietnamese lawyer in Manitoba; and the current president, Mr. Fortunato Lim, is the principal teacher in Winnipeg.

Leaders like Art Miki, Yenny Trinh, Fortunato Lim and others helped to inspire me and many people and always reminded us to never forget those who paved the path before us. This also includes political leaders of Asian origin, like the Honourable Philip Lee, who served as the first Chinese Canadian Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba.

This is what The Asian Heritage Month Act is precisely all about: empowering our future generations through memory, celebration and connectedness. The future is paved by the past, and our collective flourishing depends on our ability to honour the history which has shaped us. The Asian Heritage Month Act will serve as the foundation for organizations like the Asian Heritage Society of Manitoba and so many other groups to continue the important work including education programming and cultural events.

As a parent, I believe that our children and youth should feel inspired by their cultural identity and within Manitoba. We have to ensure that we continue sharing in the diversity of Manitoba and remind each other that Asian heritage is a part of Canadian history. And I hope that you will join me in supporting the rich Asian communities that call Manitoba home.

Thank you, xiè xiè, merci and miigwech.

**The Chairperson:** We thank the member.

Does any other member wish to make an opening statement on Bill 212?

**MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** As stated in the House earlier, I'm very pleased to be part of this day and the history that's being done here, and I, again, thank you for bringing this forward. I'll keep the remarks short so we can move on to the business at hand in getting this passed.

**The Chairperson:** During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

### Committee Substitutions

**The Chairperson:** I would like to inform the committee that under rule 85(2), the following membership substitution has been made for this committee, effective immediately: Mr. Oxenham for MLA Chen.

Thank you.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** I would like to inform all in attendance of the provisions in our rules regarding the hours of adjournment. A standing committee meeting to consider a bill must not sit past midnight to hear public presentations or to consider clause by clause of a bill, except by unanimous consent of the committee.

Written submissions from the following people have been received and distributed to the committee members on the MLA portal: Aimee Rice, private citizen, on Bill 208; Chris Allinotte, private citizen, on Bill 208; Sara Tarrant, private citizen, on Bill 208; Abiola Agbayewa, private citizen, on Bill 208.

Does the committee agree to have these documents appear in the Hansard transcript of this meeting?  
[Agreed]

Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I would like to advise members of the public regarding the process for speaking in committee. In accordance with our rules, a time limit of 10 minutes has been allotted for presentations, with another five minutes allowed for questions from committee members. Questions shall not exceed 30 seconds in length, with no time limit for answers. Questions may be addressed to presenters in the following rotation: first, the member sponsoring the bill; second, a member of the official opposition; and third, an independent member.

If a presenter is not in attendance when their name is called, they will be dropped to the bottom of the list. If the presenter is not in attendance when their name

is called a second time, they will be removed from the presenters list.

The proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript. Each time someone wishes to speak, whether it be an MLA or a presenter, I first have to say the person's name. This is the signal for the Hansard recorder to turn the mics on and off.

**Bill 208—The Two-Spirit and Transgender  
Day of Visibility Act  
(Commemoration of Days, Weeks  
and Months Act Amended)**

**The Chairperson:** I will now call on Mr. Adam Donaghy.

Do you have any written materials for distribution to the committee?

**Adam Donaghy (Private Citizen):** No, I do not.

**The Chairperson:** Please proceed with your presentation.

**A. Donaghy:** Hello, committee. It is with great pride and honour that I can speak to you today. My name is Adam, and I'm one of nearly 60,000 transgender people in Canada. This statistic is not new to you. It has been brought up as a reason to make two-spirit and transgender day of visibility an officially passed Manitoban bill.

My statistic and my percentage may create a lasting impact—sorry—on what this province's future transgender and two-spirited people see within themselves and their community. For a long time, I wished only to hide who I was and to blend in with the cisgender population that I had known too well.

When I did express my identity, it came with stepping into a spotlight that I was not prepared for. Kids my age don't know what being transgender is. Some people ask questions that shouldn't be asked to anyone, and some people fear the unknown and just get mad. I didn't want to be seen as the trans kid. I felt ashamed to say that I am transgender.

It takes an immeasurable strength to present yourself to the world. It also takes a certain vulnerability to admit to yourself that you do not like what gender you have been raised as, and that you would like to go and—through the perilous journey to change that.

For this reason, I think that having a day of visibility is extremely important to attribute to every transgender and two-spirited person in Canada who

has taken the courage to find themselves and take the action to represent who they are.

I would also like to recognize who has gotten us here today. Many transphobic points are made that transgender and two-spirited people have only begun to make an appearance in the 21st century. As for two-spirited people, I cannot speak directly on this issue, but I know that Indigenous people's knowledge of said identity dates back to the 1900s.

Marsha P. Johnson, who notably joined the Gay Liberation Front and participated in the uprising of Stonewall Inn, identified as gender non-conforming. Marsha dedicated her entire life to the LGBTQ movement, yet still people say that transgender and two-spirited people only appeared in the 2000s.

There are many things about me that I can shed easily or hide away: I play the saxophone, my favourite colour is green, or bears are my favourite animals, but being transgender is like a tattoo. You can hide it all you like, but it is a part of you. And sure, it may hurt at first and it takes time, but it heals and becomes a piece of you.

This two-spirit and transgender day of visibility is important for me, but I ask you to think of the 3,600 or so transgender people in Manitoba that couldn't stand here before you and speak their mind. I implore you to think of the 16,000 transgender and two-spirit people living in Alberta, where a bill like this may not even be considered.

Though this day is not—is perhaps not as important to you or other cisgender people as it is to me and other transgender and two-spirit people, I would like to think that this day, marked on calendars, posted on signs on social media, will encourage people to open their minds to the transgender and two-spirit community that has been cultivated here in Manitoba.

I think of—I think back to how the 12-year-old version of me would be in awe of where I am today. I think of how proud my 10-year-old sister, who is watching right now, is proud to say that she has a transgender brother who is smart, kind and brave. I think of the look on a person's face when I tell them that I, too, am transgender and I see them relax slightly.

\* (18:20)

Though it pains me to think that transgender and two-spirit people have to put up a guard around a person that they don't know, it brings me joy to see

that a community like ours can recognize each other's struggles, pains and journeys through each other and connect through that.

I am grateful for the opportunities that I've been given in this province, and I'm excited to fulfill goals that four years ago seemed unattainable. I hope that in the future people who feel similarly to me can speak for themselves and access the care that they need. Because for transgender and two-spirit people, transition is not a hope or a dream, it is a need.

Before I close this off, I'd like to share a moment of my transition with you all. I started testosterone only two months ago, and already I feel so immensely comfortable with myself. It is still a new development and I still have a long way to go, but it feels like a puzzle piece clicking into place. It's hard to explain to cisgender people how that feels, but I like to think of—it's like dreaming of, like, a haircut or a piece of clothing or a tattoo that you have been dreaming of and waiting to get for four years. When you finally accomplish that and look in the mirror and think, yes, this is me, that is what I hope that all transgender and two-spirited people will be able to share with me one day as well.

I am forever honoured to be a piece, however small, of this province's history. Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have any questions for the presenter?

**Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park):** Hi, Adam.

I just—I don't really have a question. I just want to really lift you up and thank you for your courage and for coming here, and for being a part of history and for getting your words onto the permanent record. It's so important for our community to be a part of history, and we've been a part of history.

And I just want to lift you up. You've done such a great job. Thank you for your words.

**The Chairperson:** While there wasn't a question, you are welcome to respond if you'd like.

**A. Donaghy:** Thank you.

**MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** So I, too, would like to thank you for coming here today. It's clear that it took a lot of courage to get here, and I want to uplift you for that. And, yes, thanks. I'm not going to go any further into it, but yes, thank you so much for being here today and presenting.

**The Chairperson:** Again it wasn't a question, but you're welcome to respond if you'd like.

**A. Donaghy:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Any other questions?

Thank you so much.

I didn't include this with my explanation, but unfortunately applause aren't a part of our process. But we appreciate the enthusiasm of the room.

I will now call on Mikayla Hunter. Do you have any written materials to distribute for the committee?

**Mikayla Hunter (Private Citizen):** No, I do not.

**The Chairperson:** Okay. Please proceed with your presentation.

**M. Hunter:** Good evening everyone. My name is Mikayla Hunter. My pronouns are she/they, and I am a queer and gender-diverse graduate student at the University of Manitoba.

Before I speak any further I would like to first thank MLA Logan Oxenham for introducing this bill and for having us all come today to speak.

This bill is one of incredible importance to the 2SLGBTQI+ community and for the betterment of society more broadly. This may sound like an exaggeration, but I can assure you it's not.

Today I had the honour of hosting the University of Manitoba's very first lavender graduation ceremony. This graduation ceremony specifically acknowledges and celebrates the achievements of 2SLGBTQI+ graduates. As I stood on the stage speaking to the graduates today, seeing the tears in their eyes as they were recognized for all they had persevered through, I couldn't help but to think what I might say at this committee meeting tonight.

This 'graduation'—graduation ceremony reminded me of how important visibility it is, how important it is to be seen and acknowledged by a society that has worked so hard to erase you. In the United States over 550 anti-trans bills have been under consideration in 2024 alone; 37 of them have passed.

Unfortunately, we are seeing the introduction of such bills here, in the form of the parental rights bill in Saskatchewan that puts trans and gender-diverse youth at risk of being forcibly outed at the hands of the teachers who they are meant to be able to trust.

I have heard the argument that this would only be done when it is, quote, safe to do so, but the fact of the

matter is you simply cannot know if and when it is safe to do so. If a child is not out to their family at home, there is a reason for it. Unfortunately, home is not a safe place for every child. I know this myself all too well.

We are also seeing the restrictions on life-saving gender-affirming care. Let me reiterate that: life-saving gender-affirming care.

As a health sciences student and aspiring independent researcher and a gender-diverse person myself, I can tell you that gender-affirming care is the number one way to decrease suicide in trans and gender-diverse populations.

A study by Bailey et al. found that 67 per cent of people who were transitioning thought about suicide pre-transition. Only 3 per cent thought about suicide post-transition.

I would be remiss to not also mention that gender-affirming care looks different for each person and that each of these options are provided at age-appropriate times. With regard to surgical gender-affirming care, studies have consistently demonstrated that the regret rate after surgery is less than 1 per cent. Comparatively, total knee replacement surgeries have a regret rate of 17 per cent.

So what does this all mean in terms of the proposed two-spirit and trans day of visibility bill? It's quite simple, really.

The very fact that I had to come here tonight to tell you all of that is exactly why we need the two-spirit and trans day of visibility bill. The 2SLGBTQI+ community, especially transgender, gender-diverse and two-spirit people, have been fighting against hateful rhetoric that seek to, at minimum, suppress our existence, and at worst, see us cease to exist altogether.

I believe that most people do not say or think these things out of hatred. I believe that for the most part, these beliefs are borne of ignorance. As elected officials, I trust you all understand the importance of getting accurate information into the hands of the public, into the hands of your constituents.

Days of awareness are just one of the ways that we can combat misinformation and advocate together for a more just society. Although personally knowing someone who is 2SLGBTQI+ is consistently cited in research as being the most effective way to increase societal acceptance of 2SLGBTQI+ people, I would like to draw your attention to two additional important

factors that you have the ability to influence here today.

Pride-related events and awareness campaigns are one of the top seven ways to foster societal acceptance of the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Not only do these events offer a venue to distribute information and teach people, it also provides a space for people to meet and discuss.

At the trans day of visibility flag-raising event hosted by my student group at the University of Manitoba Bannatyne campus this year, I had the chance to have some very fruitful conversations with people who had very simple questions. They wanted to know what the day was about, about why we talk so much about mental health in gender identity, about why and how gender-affirming care works and what it looks like.

By the time our conversation was done, the person I was speaking to thanked me for talking to them and happily took one of the pride flag donuts that they were hesitating around prior. From where I stood, it seemed as if the trepidation that came with deciding whether or not to take a sweet treat with a trans pride flag on it was lifted once they had some more information. This wouldn't have happened without the trans day of visibility event we held or the day itself.

Another one of the most effective ways to increase societal acceptance of 2SLGBTQI+ people is vocal support from leaders, especially those who are not 2SLGBTQI+ themselves. As politicians, you have power, not just in policy creation and decision making, but in representing the constituents that elected you.

Showing support for marginalized communities encourages people to consider the way they see—they see these groups of people too. Conversely, when elected officials show disrespect and outright hostility to communities, the inverse is also true. Elected officials have the ability to sway the masses, both for the better and for the worse.

Now that I have spoken about research in the area and cited some statistics to you, I would like to add some personal context. I grew up in a small town in rural Manitoba. Unfortunately, rural Manitoba is not well known for being the most accepting of places.

I knew from as young as 10 years old that I wasn't like all of my friends; there was something different about me. I also knew that these things about me were not things that people would be okay with. These were



things that would lead me to getting teased or bullied at school and perhaps even worse at home.

When I was in middle school and high school in the 2000s, there were no days of visibility that my schools participated in. I didn't even see a pride flag in person until I moved to Winnipeg in 2011 and started university. I didn't know that this was something I could be. I didn't know that it was okay to be proud of who I was.

Growing up where I did, I grew to hate who I was while my cis-gender straight peers got to explore every aspect of themselves unfettered while I had to keep a part of me locked up, safe and hidden away.

\* (18:30)

Now as an adult, my heart aches for that younger person, that younger version of me. I wish nothing more than to be able to tell her that there was nothing wrong with her. I wish I could give her the words to talk about who she was instead of having to stumble across them on the Internet alone in her bedroom and confused with no one to talk to.

Days like the two-spirit and trans day visibility could have been that entry point for the younger me to learn to love themselves.

While it is too late for me to have that experience, it is not too late for the youth who are discovering themselves right now. Today, tomorrow and in all the years to come, I implore you: do this for them, so that the generations that come up after us can grow up with love in their hearts for themselves instead of with the resentment for things they can't control.

I'll conclude here with an unfortunate but true reality: the tides of hate against the 2SLGBTQI+ community are ever rising, and I fear we have not yet seen its peak. I fear that we have not yet encountered the most damaging of anti-trans, anti-queer policies here in Canada. What's more, I know that I'm not alone in this fear.

However, not all hope is lost. The tides may rise, but you can do something about it: something as simple as Manitoba officially recognizing the two-spirit and trans day of visibility can be the storm wall that keeps the fear and hate at bay, if only for a moment. It can be the start of Manitoba becoming what I hope will one day be a safe haven for 2SLGBTQI+ people. We are already a safer place than others, and with this bill we move one step closer to being somewhere well and truly safe.

I hope that you all see that all we are asking for you here today is your recognition, to acknowledge that we are here, that we have always been here and that we will continue to be here. While this bill cannot end the work we must do together to improve the lives of marginalized people in Manitoba, including the 2SLGBTQI+ community, it can be an important stepping stone along the way.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for your presentation.

Do members of the committee have questions for the presenter?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Mikayla, thank you so much for your words. It's not so much a question again, as I just want to affirm you as being such a leader for young people. I know you do so much for folks in your community, and it really means a lot to folks who are just looking, like you said, they're looking for reflections of themselves out there in the world.

And so putting yourself on the record here today is really special, and we're so glad you're here. Thank you for your words.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond?

**Floor Comment:** Just to say thank you—

**The Chairperson:** Mikayla. Sorry, I have to acknowledge you, Mikayla.

**M. Hunter:** I'd also just like to say thank you and in listening to that—to also just acknowledge that there are a lot of people who probably would have loved to be here today to talk, but who aren't safe to do so, and so it is a privilege to be able to come here and be open about myself because it is safe for me to be out as who I am, and to know that there are people who right now it isn't possible for them. But their words and their voices matter too.

So I hope I've done them justice.

**The Chairperson:** Are there other questions.

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Thank you for your presentation, Mikayla. That was—you put on a clinic in advocacy there. That was very eloquent. Thank you for taking time out of your evening.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond? No pressure.

**M. Hunter:** I guess just thank you.

**The Chairperson:** So if you want to request leave for the whole meeting we can have government members ask questions.

MLA Dela Cruz? Government members have to request leave to ask questions in committee, so if you want to ask for blanket leave for the meeting we can do this once for the whole night.

**MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Radisson):** I'd like to request leave for government members to be able to ask questions as well.

**The Chairperson:** Is there leave for government members to ask questions throughout the meeting? *[Agreed]*

**MLA Dela Cruz:** Thanks for the patience as we learn how committees work on this side as well.

I just want to put some words on the record just to lift you up, because I know that we've had the chance to know each other for a little while now, and I am continually inspired by the work that you are doing to translate your passion for equity seeking communities and intersectional communities into academia and hopefully policy change.

Things that you're doing in menstrual equity, in gender-affirming care, I really just want to affirm you in all of that, and again, lift you up.

**The Chairperson:** Mikayla, you're welcome to respond.

**M. Hunter:** Just awesome, thank you. I was expecting, like, oh, if there's any questions—I think there's another one.

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity):** I just stopped by; I was at another meeting, and I knew that the committee is—so I just wanted to quickly support my amazing colleague.

But I just want to say miigwech for your presentation, and to all of the folks who are presenting today. It is so important that your voices are heard and that you're here this evening. So I just lift up each and every one of you.

**M. Hunter:** I guess, just, thank you again.

**The Chairperson:** Any other questions?

Thank you so much, Mikayla.

I will now call on Mx. Luca Gheorghica.

Do you have any written materials you wish to pass around to the committee?

**Luca Gheorghica (Private Citizen):** No.

**The Chairperson:** So please proceed with your presentation.

**L. Gheorghica:** *Romanian spoken. Translation unavailable.*

Good day, and welcome. Let me introduce myself. My name is Mx. Luca Gheorghica. I am from the pigeon clan. My pronouns are they-them-theirs. I am trans-masculine. I invite you to sit, listen and engage while the voices of lived experiences fill the room.

I am community-based, community-focused and community-driven international public speaker and genderqueer advocate, and legally blind vision-impaired local artist. I strive for accessibility in all aspects of community, trying to help build and create safer and braver spaces within the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, BIPOC, POC, trans, non-binary communities.

Before I begin, I would like to put a content warning. My journey to Treaty 1 territory wasn't easy. As a person who was adopted during the time of Nicolae Ceaușescu, conceived in a Romanian prison system, to have my birth mother, Maria *[phonetic]*, killed 13 days later. I've had—she was only the young age of 15. I have had my share fair of challenges before the age of three and a half, although I got to rebuild and start my life over.

I came out to my family at a very young age. I had been identifying as gender-fluid since nine. I've always known who I was. With each journey, I would become and find myself a little bit more, despite others' disapproval, of learning how to love myself as I am.

Most people, including myself, after all those years in child and adolescent on PY1 at psych health at HSC, I actually didn't realize I had received the best gender-affirming care any trans child could've ever asked for. I was being listened, I was being acknowledged, I felt visible, unlike at home. I felt loved and seen.

Fast forward: it's 2009. After being sexually assaulted for my sexuality to prove a point I wasn't gay, I fell into a deep depression. I hid from the community for what seemed forever. In 2014 I met my drag mother in person after recognizing her wig on Facebook. She was working the last 15 minutes before closing during the attack. I had only the hair that gave me comfort. Thank you, Sandy Bay *[phonetic]*.

I started going to Sunshine House, like that drop-in program, and I met a world of community and my chosen family. I started doing drag to help reduce the gender dysphoria I had been facing all those years. I was free to be.

Fast forward again: it's 2017, after being attacked in community in my own home for my sexuality, I landed in the hospital. That's when a social worker asked me, out of the blue, what do you need, what would you like to see happen, what can I do for you. I told her I was transgender, and I wanted to live my life and live on my own, and fully transition into who I was always meant to be. It is time.

She did the right thing. She listened and followed through. As we were parting ways, she told me her child was also trans. I wish them both well. Because of this small act of kindness and believing me, I was able to move forward out of the hospital to live my truth and just be.

\* (18:40)

I fell in love with my love, who is here tonight in the crowd. 2018, I had received one of the biggest heartbreaks of my life: my parent Charles *[phonetic]* passed away. That evening, I thought, was the first trans march. I had actually showed up a day early, not understanding why the community wasn't there.

I have had an active role alongside with the community planning the trans march since—in any capacity I was able to. The community would face many more losses as we journey through with the small successes in community. We are held back at the provincial level.

It's so important to recognize Bill 208, Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act. I don't feel very visible as a trans person. This doesn't actually show committee is moving forward, recognizing the harms that have been done. Truth and 'reconciliation' begins with acknowledgment and acceptance until this bill is passed.

I currently volunteer at 50 different community—and doing different community events, sharing my transness and lived perspectives with many different organizations and platforms, including World Health Organization, being co-authored in the emerge of medicine for queer health.

Having really tough yet necessary conversations, being on multiple platforms, including the University of Manitoba and York University in Toronto as the committee advisory board for the 2SLGBT+ poverty in Canada pilot project, attending rallies, helping

facilitate at community events, calling out trans genocide two years ago at the human rights museum during the social housing symposium, accessing and advocating for safer queer housing.

I would like to take this moment of silence for all those we have lost in community to the losses—and those we love in community, holding space and light after losing two-spirit elder, Granny Kelly Houle, and the adventures that happened during her last month of life, visiting her in the ICU daily to receive lateral violence by the security downstairs before going in while just trying to grieve my friend and community member.

With great sadness on the early morning of February 22, at 12:24, the day of Paris' *[phonetic]* celebration of life after they tragically lost their life to a toxic supply of substances, I would like to hold this moment of silence.

I'm starting to believe there's such a thing as too much lived experience. After my public engagement at McGill University at congress, speaking on behalf of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and accessing emergency food services through community lens perspective, on June 11 to the 14th, I will be going into treatment for anorexia nervosa and PTSD. As I rehabilitate myself back to life and restore my health to hopefully one day continue to do the passionate heart work I do in community that has helped keep me going for many years, I am forever thankful.

Tell a trans person you love them because tomorrow is not guaranteed. From one trans person to another, I see you; I hear you; I care. Love is louder. You are loved.

Community care is self-care. Someone you love or maybe even know is two-spirited or transgender or even both. We have existed for years and we aren't going anywhere. Being trans and gender-affirming care continues to save my life and is life-saving for two-spirit and transgender people in particular.

I may have lost my personal battle in life, it seems. I am thankful for being transgender. I am happy I am becoming healthy again to complete my last step in my gender reassignment surgery, hopefully by the end of this year.

Let's continue to have that recognition and be visible. Our ancestors, our futures, today's, tomorrow's, our children, our youth, our community of all ages, regardless of gender or race. Our community has struggled enough. Let us rest. Let us be. Let us be visible. It is time to make change and not just talk

about it. The community is resilient from all four directions.

Thank you for acknowledging those with lived experience in the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, two-spirit, transgender community.

*Romanian spoken. Translation unavailable.*

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for your presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Again, Luca, I just—it's not a question; it's thank you for choosing life. Thank you for living and being such a beacon of hope to so many people through your advocacy work; it's so important. So thank you for that. We see you and we love you, and we respect you. Thank you for your words.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond?

**L. Gheorghica:** Thank you. Please pass the bill.

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** Luca, thank you so much for what you said. As elected officials, when we run for different parties, whether it be the PC Party, the NDP party, the Liberal Party, the Green Party, but once we get elected, we need to represent all of our constituents.

Thank you so much for coming forward today and speaking to us. I'm so sorry to hear about your parent, Charles [*phonetic*]. I'm so sorry to hear about your being attacked, but I'm thankful to hear that you're going into treatment for your PTSD and your anorexia. It's a different time—

**The Chairperson:** Sorry, MLA, your time has expired; it's 30 seconds.

Would you like to respond, or I could ask for more questions?

**L. Gheorghica:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** Any other questions?

Thank you so much.

I will now call on Alex Rana from the Manitoba 2SLGBTQIA+ Student Action Coalition.

Is there an Alex Rana? Alex will be moved to the—oh, you know what? Alex is virtual.

Please unmute yourself and turn your video on.

Hi, Alex. 'Prease'—please proceed with your presentation.

**Alex Rana (Manitoba 2SLGBTQIA+ Student Action Coalition):** Hi, can you hear me? Okay, so hi, everyone. My name is Alex Rana. My pronouns are he/him, and I'm here presenting today on behalf of Manitoba 2SLGBTQIA+ Student Action Coalition.

Our group, which is comprised of queer and trans post-secondary student activists at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, stands fully in support of this bill to recognize two-spirit and transgender day of visibility in Manitoba.

Transgender day of visibility was first celebrated internationally on March 31, 2009, over 15 years ago now. Since then, it has been increasingly recognized in many areas. This year, members of our group co-ordinated three university-recognized trans day of visibility ceremonies and the transgender flag raisings at the University of Manitoba Fort Garry campus, the U of M Bannatyne campus and the University of Winnipeg. Although it was certainly a milestone to have these transgender day of visibility events officially recognized by universities, this is just one example of how we can ensure the trans and two-spirit Manitobans feel welcome and supported.

Our community has been celebrating this day in many different ways for the past decade and a half before, and we will continue to do so for years to come. Giving this day recognition on the provincial level is important, especially now, considering the current state of rising hate, misinformation and transphobia that seeks to harm two-spirit and transgender individuals, particularly trans kids.

\* (18:50)

When we have a day that recognizes and celebrates our community, we ensure that we remain visible and our existence cannot be diminished. This gives us an opportunity to draw attention to the struggles that others have chosen to place in our way as well as a chance to highlight the resilience and joy of the two-spirit and transgender community.

Transgender and two-spirit people who are not able to be visible or who are still exploring their identity are able to see there's a whole community that exists here in Manitoba who are thriving and we are here to support them.

This day also provides opportunities for those who are not two-spirit or transgender to learn about our community and see trans people and two-spirit

people can do anything from becoming educators to artists to community organizers.

Recognizing this day encourages others to become familiar with the transgender and two-spirit community and educate themselves on what they can do to be in solidarity and show up for us when we need it. Any opportunity to increase understanding about people who may have a different experience or identity is only a benefit toward building a better community and a better Manitoba.

As a Manitoban queer and trans post-secondary students, we hope to see a future for us where we are respected, celebrated and valued. We want those who come after us to experience the same thing and not have to struggle for the bare minimum acknowledgement that we exist.

Transgender and two-spirit Manitobans are here, and ensuring our existence is visible and recognized is essential for our community to feel supported.

And that's all.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for your presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Once again, Alex, I just want to thank you as opposed to asking you a question and—for your advocacy work with the Manitoba 2SLGBTQIA student action coalition. Great work creating space for other youth to get together and to really push forward rights for trans and gender-diverse folks. So really appreciate it.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond, Alex?

**A. Rana:** I just also want to say thank you, too.

**The Chairperson:** Awesome, thank you.

Any other questions?

**MLA Lagassé:** Thank you so much, Alex, for your presentation tonight. I am learning so much this evening and I really appreciate the words that are being shared and that you guys are sharing your story as well.

So thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Are there any other questions?

Alex, would you like to respond?

**A. Rana:** Also just thank you for that.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much, Alex.

I will now call on Mr. Jackson Unger.

Do you have anything to distribute to the committee? No?

Okay, please proceed with your presentation.

**Jackson Unger (Private Citizen):** Good evening to everyone present. My name is Jackson Unger, and I'm a 25-year-old transgender man from rural Manitoba.

I came out seven years ago and have been transitioning for six. I was planning to speak on how misunderstood I feel as a transgender person in today's society, how there are people out there who take misunderstanding personally and use it for fuel that overrides critical thinking or empathy, contributing to circulation of misinformation directed toward transgender people that can border on dehumanizing and inflammatory; that this bill to enshrine two-spirit and transgender day of visibility would contribute towards a society that can highlight and celebrate differences, a trait which should be embedded in the foundation of any city or province that wishes to promote an environment we can all not only tolerate but thrive in together, and which does not contribute to poking holes in our collective community safety net.

If I did not speak on my personal journey and the frustrations that I am experiencing as a transgender community advocate this year, I would be doing many people a disservice. The most powerful thing that a transgender person can do is to share their story.

I graduated from Hanover School Division in 2016. It was very clear that I came from poverty while being raised in a school that upholds Mennonite values.

These values were not entirely lost on me despite them not accepting me. My grandmother taught me how to unapologetically be myself, to do unto others as you would have them do unto you, to have faith even when the path isn't clear, and never to back down from doing what you believe in.

These values greatly aid my work as a health-care aid in a Mennonite long-term-care facility, a job I take very seriously and perform with honour and best intentions.

I didn't have access to the same information as children with 24-hour, unrestricted access to the Internet, a community that promoted or even understood 2SLGBTQ+ experience or values or any

close relatives that would stand beside a confused transgender youth.

I was suffering silently and had to find 2SLGBTQ+ community secretly for fear of being shunned. I am—I came to Winnipeg on a loan and a scholarship to the University of Manitoba immediately after graduation, getting free from the expectations others placed on my shoulders based entirely on my gender at birth; a weight lifted off my shoulders and I came out to my family as transgender.

My mother's immediate reaction was to come in the middle of the night to tell me how much she loved and supported me. It took less than a day for this moment to morph into one of deep misunderstanding. I sat through many phone calls from family members accusing me and the 2SLGBTQ+ community of horrible things. I knew this was only a reaction to them feeling as if they were losing their child, but to me it felt like I was losing my family, as they continued to choose not to see me for who I was and how I feared their reaction to me making my own decisions over my life.

This was further silenced by accusations that our transgender community are weak. This couldn't be further from the truth, as our brave and resilient community continues to show its integrity, grace and passion for positive change.

I couldn't finish my first year of university because of the mental strain I was put under at the time. Later that year I had to go back to live with my parents due to unstable housing and employment, making the very difficult decision to abandon my identity in hopes that a happier life lay ahead for the straight cisgender version of myself. This only lasted a couple months until a heated eruption—heated discussion erupted due to watching a transphobic video filled with misinformation, and this left me extremely unsafe, scared and alone.

I couldn't live under those conditions and ran away to the city of Winnipeg through help from queer friends and the people I met at the amazing support groups held at the Rainbow Resource Centre.

There doesn't exist a way for me to adequately thank the community advocates who do work with and for the community centres within the city of Winnipeg. It was only through my decision to reach out for help to the many different resources in our community to ensure my safety as a transgender member of the community.

Today the bond between me and my family is stronger than ever, even though they still have a lot to understand about my identity. This bond continues to be attacked by waves and waves of misinformation like we saw this year.

My story isn't unique and that's why it must be shared. Many transgender people everywhere are feeling alone, misunderstood, hurt by those close to them, and unable to let it out for fear of discrimination or ridicule. Creating a day where we are accepted and not only by other 2SLGBTQ+ folks and our allies, but by our city and province, celebrating our journeys and combatting the waves of misinformation is an amazing first step to creating space for the transgender community in a society that, at times, is suffocating for us.

Thank you very much, and I hope that I provided some meaningful insight in the transgender experience of those coming from rural communities.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for your presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Jackson, thank you very much. It's great to see you just growing into yourself. I met you years ago and your family must be so proud. And it's really great to see you.

Thank you for your advocacy work, as well, that you do a lot of the community, and really appreciate you and see you and the work that you're doing. I really want to lift you up for that. So thank you, Jackson.

\* (19:00)

**The Chairperson:** Oh, sorry. Would you like to respond?

**J. Unger:** Thank you very much.

**The Chairperson:** Are there other questions?

**Mrs. Cook:** Thank you, Jackson, for coming here today and for having the courage to share your story and what it was like for you growing up in rural Manitoba. I just—I want you to know that we heard every word. Thanks for coming.

**The Chairperson:** Jackson, you're free to respond if you'd like.

**J. Unger:** Thank you very much.

**The Chairperson:** Are there other questions?

Thank you so much for your presentation.

I will now call on Mr. Reece Malone.

Do you have any written materials for distribution to the committee?

Okay, you may begin your presentation.

**Reece Malone (Private Citizen):** It's a real honour to be here and I feel incredibly privileged to present and to share space with my community.

My name is Dr. Reece Malone. I am a certified sexologist in private practice and professor in human sexuality at the California Institute for Integral Studies. I am currently a member of the human rights committee of council of the City of Winnipeg and are one of the founding members of the Prairie Health Trans Research Alliance. I served as a consultant to the World Health Organization, contributing to the document entitled Blueprint for the Provision of Comprehensive Care for Trans Persons and their Communities in the Caribbean and Other Anglophone Countries, and I am the principal author of the national round table report on gender identity and gender expression on behalf of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which contributed to the inclusion of gender identity and expression to the Canadian Human Rights Act in 2017.

Today I'm here to address a matter of paramount importance, that being the recognition of The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act. It is a crucial imperative and life-affirming that the Province of Manitoba acknowledges, through such declarations, the historical truth of gender diversity and the profound impact of colonization. Colonization has historically imposed gender binaries, conflated sex and gender identity and left legacies that include sexism, genderism, transphobia, gender-based violence, harassment, stigmatization and the exclusion of two-spirit, transgender and non-binary citizens and cultures.

For example, Manitoba currently remains as the only province in Canada that does not explicitly name gender expression as a protected characteristic under its own provincial Human Rights Code. The enactment of this act is foundational. It goes beyond recognizing the mere existence of gender diversity. It signifies the acknowledgement of the inherent gifts, strengths and contributions that two-spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse Manitobans bring to our cultures and society.

Firstly, gender diversity beyond cisgenderism is not a mere phenomenon, but a historical truth that

spans cultures and time. While the act acknowledges two-spirit people among Indigenous communities, the act inherently acknowledges the richness and vibrancy among many cultures inherent to so many Manitobans and their families, such as the Māhū individuals of Hawaii, Hijra individuals of South Asia, whakawahine and Whakatāne persons of New Zealand, and the Chukchi people of Serbia and finally, also the baklâ [*gay person*] in my home country of the Philippines.

These are just some examples of diverse gender identities worldwide that have had historical reverence. To deny the existence of two-spirit, transgender and non-binary individuals and their cultures is to erase centuries of human diversity and resilience. Moreover, the consequences of not recognizing and affirming gender diversity are particularly severe when viewed through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality reminds us that individuals are shaped not only by their gender identity and expressions but also by the experiences of discrimination that include race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability and other intersecting identities.

In other words, individuals' experiences of discrimination is not an either/or phenomenon based on specific characteristics, but a both/and reality, with levels of risk dependent on the context of their situation. For some to many gender-diverse Manitobans, this places an additional burden that can have negative, long-lasting outcomes to quality of life.

Such compounded discrimination and barriers include accessing health care, employment and social services. This intersectional discrimination exacerbates the consequential high rates of mental health and wellness challenges within these communities, communities with a historic system that has either been silent, complacent or of pathologized gender diversity.

March 31 is the International Transgender Day of Visibility, founded by Rachel Crandall-Crocker, 'appropally' anchors The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act, as it celebrates and recognizes the experiences and contributions of transgender and non-binary people. It promotes equity and inclusion, and it also empowers the transgender and non-binary people to celebrate their identities openly and proudly.

By its extension, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act unequivocally communicates that the Province of Manitoba staunchly opposes any regression or rollbacks on human rights, disinformation that gender diversity is a mere social or

peer-based contagion effect or that there are hidden motivations to dissuade from honouring customs and traditions that promote social cohesion and emotional fulfillment.

On the contrary, the recognition of the act serves as a symbolic bridge that unites families from varied cultural backgrounds, potentially catalyzing profound ripple effects throughout our cultural ecosystem. For example, the act promotes a greater cultural understanding and compassion within communities. This can lead to reduced stigma and discrimination, fostering a more inclusive society where diversity is celebrated.

The act can inspire other jurisdictions to adopt similar legislation, influencing policy at regional, national and even international levels. This can create a domino effect where more governments enact protections and rights for two-spirit, transgender and non-binary individuals.

The act allows schools and education institutions to better expand and incorporate histories, contributions and meaningful discussions about two-spirit, transgender and transgender identities that promote awareness, compassion and empathy among students, staff, teachers and admin. This education can lead to a generation that is more informed and supportive of diversity intersectionally and overall.

Recognizing two-spirit, transgender and non-binary identities in cultures can lead to economic opportunities, empowering businesses to be more expansive specifically to two-spirit, transgender and non-binary communities or within inclusive-workplace policies that attract diverse talent. Socially, it can empower gender-diverse individuals to participate more fully in civic life and community activities.

The act serves to improve recognition and visibility, leading to better health-care access and health outcomes. It can also encourage research into specific health needs and disparities within these communities, driving improvements in health-care provision and services. Studies consistently show that two-spirit, transgender and non-binary individuals, especially those from marginalized community-marginalized backgrounds, experience disproportionate challenges in all stages of social development and through the lifeline.

The Canadian Mental Health Association underscores these disparities, highlighting the urgent need for more inclusive policies and affirming practices—

such as this one—that support the overall and well-being of gender-diverse Manitobans and, by extension, their families. The Calls for Justice related to missing and murdered women, girls and 2SLGBTQ individuals in Canada urges legal reforms and accountability that overhaul practices that perpetuate factors that lead to violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQA people.

Implementing this act signifies a crucial step towards accountability and justice.

\* (19:10)

Acknowledging and embracing gender diversity is not just a moral imperative, but also an economic and societal opportunity. Diversity in all its forms fosters creativity, innovation and resilience. It enriches our family lives, workplaces, educational institutions and cultural fabric, driving progress and prosperity for all Manitobans.

In conclusion, the recognition of The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act, with a commitment to intersectional inclusivity, is not only a matter of justice, but also a 'cornerstone' of a healthier, equitable and inclusive society.

Let us acknowledge the historical truths of two-spirit, transgender and non-binary people, support the health and well-being of gender-diverse Manitobans and celebrate the strengths and harness opportunities that comes from embracing our differences.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for that well-timed presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Hello Reece—Dr. Malone. It's such a privilege to have you here to help educate folks around the table. You've been doing this work for many, many years and it's been work that the community really appreciates and values. You've taught me so much, Reece, you know, in my—through my journey and you've helped so many through their journeys. So thank you for that, and thank you for putting all your insight onto the record.

**The Chairperson:** You're welcome to respond, Mr. Malone.

**R. Malone:** Appreciate your comments. Thank you.

**MLA Bereza:** Thank you so much, Dr. Malone, for your presentation. And thank you for helping to



educate me as well. I appreciate your presentation tonight.

**The Chairperson:** You're welcome to respond.

**R. Malone:** I'm available at any time.

**MLA Dela Cruz:** Dr. Malone, I wanted to extend a statement of gratitude as well. I sincerely appreciate your contributions to public health, community health. I really appreciate how you brought to the table, you know, decolonizing lands and how you brought phrases like *baklâ [gay person]*, that have probably never been uttered in this room before, to the table as well.

I—our people have such a history with Babaylan and pre-colonial matriarchy, and I think a lot of what you put on the record today ought to be in a lot of history books and aren't yet, so thank you again and thanks for taking the time.

**R. Malone:** Appreciate your comments. Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Any other questions? Thank you so much for your presentation.

I will now call on Charlotte Nolin from 2Spirit Manitoba Inc.

Do you have any written materials you'd like to distribute? Okay, then please proceed with your presentation, Charlotte.

**Charlotte Nolin (2Spirit Manitoba Inc.):** Tansi. Boozhoo. [*Hello.*]

*Indigenous language spoken. Translation unavailable.*

Greetings, my relatives. The words I bring to you tonight are from here. The elders always told us that when we speak, to speak from here, from our spirit.

I'm a product of the '60s scoop Indian day schools, residential schools, and to let you know that 50 years ago, I was not allowed to walk out during the day as me. I was met with violence. I can't count the number of times that I was beaten. I lost sisters.

So I went back in the closet, so to speak. Got married, had children because society wanted me to live that way.

In 2015, I made the decision I was going to transition to be myself. I remember the day I told my doctor, and he asked me, how far do you want to take this? I says, all the way. He said, okay.

Later that day, I got all dressed up, makeup, the whole works, and I walked down to the corner store to buy a pack of cigarettes. There was a group of

children playing on the sidewalk, little boys, little girls. And one little boy looked up at me and he said, are you a man or a woman? And I said, honey, I may look masculine on the outside, but inside I'm all woman. Oh, okay. And they went back to playing.

And that told me that if our children are willing to accept us for who we are, why aren't adults? I would challenge any of you, all of you, to walk one day in my moccasins. This is the 21st century. I still get misgendered everywhere I go. I still get looks. But I was told, walk with your head up high; be proud of who you are.

Today, I work at the University of Manitoba as an elder resident. I work for the federal government as an elder. And I travel across this country sharing our teachings to the young people.

Three years ago, we purchased land just west of Portage la Prairie, and we held, last year, the first two-spirit sun dance, and it was attended by over 400 people from all over the world. That was history.

I remember when they put the trans flag up at the university, and I thought, finally. And today, we held the lavender grad ceremony, the first of its kind at the university. And that filled my heart with joy.

This act, if it goes through—or not if, when it goes through, will lift the spirits of all our young people. We know the suicide rates are the highest in our communities across this country, and I, for one, want that to stop. We know what's happening in Alberta and Saskatchewan. I wish they'd open their eyes to see us for who we are: human beings. We're the sons, daughters, cousins, mothers, fathers, and we should be given the liberty to walk in freedom in this country.

I stand here before you sharing these words from all those young people who couldn't be heard to speak, and I ask you to look in here when you make your decision. Not here. Here. That's why, when I speak, I don't take notes, because I get all confused. So the elders always told me, speak from your spirit.

Passing an act like this may not be a big thing to some people but to our community members, its weight is more than gold. It gives hope to those who didn't have hope before. And as adults, that's what we're here for: to give hope to the young people, you know.

\* (19:20)

I have seven children, nine grandchildren, and I want them all to be free. I have a grandson who was born a granddaughter and transitioned two years ago,

and his family supported him and I supported him. And, yes, he did meet obstacles at his school he went to and in society.

I want him to be free, to be able to breathe the same air that we all do. Isn't that what Canada's about? Freedom? Freedom of speech? Freedom to be who we want to be, you know?

So when you make your decision on this, think not of the words that we spoke, but think of the young people who couldn't be here to speak, out of fear or whatever. But think of them, you know. They're the future, and that's something that we as adults all know is our children are our future. I'd like to leave them a good future.

I want to thank you for listening. Kinanâskomitinawaw. *[I am thankful and grateful to you all.]* Big thank you. Kitchi miigwech. *[Thank you very much.]*

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for that presentation, Elder Charlotte.

Are there questions?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Elder Charlotte, thank you so, so very much for your words. They're so important. You've been nothing but a leader and a beacon for folks in the community for many years. You set an example for many folks. You being here tonight is so special, so thank you for taking the time to come here tonight. Miigwech.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond?

**C. Nolin:** Kinâskomitin. *[Thank you.]*

**MLA Bereza:** Elder Charlotte, I represent the constituency of Portage la Prairie. Thank you so much for what you've said tonight. I don't want to run out of time. You touched me. I would love to come to your next event. Please, I will be there. Thank you so much.

Thank you to all the presenters, but, Elder Charlotte, you touched me. Thank you so much.

**C. Nolin:** Kinâskomitin, and yes, please, do come. Our sun dance is August 22nd to the 25th, and we're right on the edge of Long Plain. So, it's—what we've told the young people—*[interjection]* Yes, we can send you directions.

What we told the young people who've come there is 2Spirit Manitoba holds the title to that land, but that land is theirs; it's home for them, a safe space, a loving place and a place to learn the ceremonies, the

culture, the traditions, the languages, which—they're just big sponges, you know, wanting to learn. So kinanâskomitin.

**The Chairperson:** Are there other questions?

Thank you so much for that presentation.

I will now call on Mx. Kai Solomon.

Do you have anything to distribute to the committee? Okay, then you can start your presentation, Kai.

**Kai Solomon (Private Citizen):** Good evening. Thank you for taking your time out of your evening to be here and listen. My name is Kai Solomon, and I am an educational assistant in the St. James school division, and I'm also part of the transgender community.

I'm here today as an educator, and I am here today as a 37-year-old individual who has not only been their true self six years ago—who has only been their true self six years ago in August. If I had not figured out my own authenticity, I wouldn't be alive today. And that's what this day, this bill, really means.

Leslie Feinberg states that my right to be me is tied with a thousand threads to your right to be you.

I've worked in the St. James school division for 17 years. Six years ago I went to my principal, George Valentim, and I told him that I was going to start my transition and what my pronouns were—are, and they are they/them.

He was, and still is, my biggest advocate. I am one of the lucky people who has a cisgender, heterosexual, white principal that would do anything to protect me from the hate. That, as sad as it sounds, is really rare.

Working in a high school, I am surprised and extremely overjoyed to see the amount of trans and two-spirit teens. Leading the GSA, I am connecting with some of the youth that will be future leaders of our city and of our province.

I am visible. I wear shirts with trans colours or shirts that are rainbow, shirts with trans flags on it as well as shirts that say to protect trans folks. I am visible for those students who need the encouragement to be themselves; a safe person for those students who can't be themselves because they aren't accepted at home, by the teachers or by their peers.

I can't change people. I can't convince people that transgender people, especially youth, exist. All I can do is be visible and fight against the hate and give

trans youth a chance; a chance at life and a chance to be visible for the next generation.

The Trevor Project reported in 2023 that transgender and non-binary youth who have their pronouns respected reported lower rates of attempted suicide. The Trevor Project also reported that one in 10 LGBTQ+ youth attempted suicide last year, 90 per cent of them negatively impacted by policies. Two statistics.

I have heard from students that I work with, the frustration they have with policies being made without their voice, mainly parental rights movement that was cause for concern for so many trans and two-spirit youth.

The American Journal for—of Surgery reported that the more people regret—that more people regret having children than gender-affirming surgery.

There is so much misinformation out in the world today, and our province needs to be better.

When I was younger, I wish I would have been told more often that I was right and nothing was wrong with me; that I was deserving of everything this world had to offer and that my visions for my future were worthy of pursuit. That's what Janet Mock, a transgender rights activist, said.

Trans and two-spirit people have always been here. The majority of the people in this room today probably know why the two-spirit and transgender day of visibility is important. There are many transgender and two-spirit individuals in this room right now, one of whom is a respected MLA.

Our government has a chance right now to save so many lives with this bill. This government has shown that diversity and being inclusive is a Manitoban right. Visibility might seem like a small thing, but to all the trans individuals who have died this year all around the world and to all those youth who haven't seen themselves represented until now, this bill, visibility itself is life or death.

I advocate through my work, through the community advisory board, through the University of Manitoba, the CBC community advisory board as well as co-facilitate the DEN, which is a Rainbow Resource Centre group which is going to be the grand marshal—one of the grand marshals of Pride. I'm also part of the Trans Manitoba steering committee as well as I run the now-paused-until-further-notice gender café. I am trying to ensure that trans and two-spirit people of different communities feel visible.

Every single Manitoban should have the right to be unapologetically and authentically themselves, visible for the world to see, especially with what is happening around the country and what could happen in our own province. That is what this bill needs.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for that presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Hi, Kai, Mr. Solomon. Nice to—all right, Mx. Solomon.

\* (19:30)

I just want to thank you so much for the work that you've done in the school. I had the pleasure of coming out to the school to visit with the kids in the GSA, and it was really special and they're really well served by you. You do such a great job.

And thank you for your advocacy with Trans Manitoba and the gender café as well. It's much—the community is very grateful to have you. Miigwech for your time.

**K. Solomon:** Thank you, Logan, for everything you do.

**The Chairperson:** Are there other questions?

**Mrs. Cook:** Hi Kai. Thank you for coming. I grew up in St. James and I went to schools in the St. James school division, and I'm a little bit older than you, but not much, and I think you know how much has changed over the years for the better. And I just wanted to thank you for your part in being that change. So, thank you for coming.

**K. Solomon:** I want to say thank you. I work at Sturgeon Heights and, yes, I've noticed St. James has changed a lot. But St. James is St. James, so there's a lot that still needs to be done, because they have their own little community, so—but thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Are there other questions?

**MLA Lagassé:** Sorry, I had to comment because the second you walked up I was like, what a fantastic shirt. So that's all I wanted to say, nothing more, that's all.

**K. Solomon:** I got this shirt from my boyfriend who is also a trans man, and it's American Eagle, their Pride collection, so.

**The Chairperson:** Wonderful.

Are there other questions?

Thank you so much for that presentation.

Next up, I will call on Ms. Kristie Schertzer. Do you have any materials to distribute?

Okay, you can start your presentation, Ms. Schertzer.

**Kristie Schertzer (Private Citizen):** Thank you so much for having me here today. Thank you for everyone who's shared so far. I really appreciate it. I'll try to really be brief here so we can hear other people's voices.

I'm speaking today in support of Bill 208 that would see March 31 recognized in Manitoba as two-spirit and transgendered visibility day. I'm a parent with four children. They're all in their twenties, and two of my children are transgender. I have a beautiful daughter who's 23, and my non-binary child who's 27.

My daughter will be graduating in two weeks with her bachelor of honours in computer science at the University of Manitoba, where my non-binary kid graduated four years ago with their bachelor of science, honours in engineering.

My kids are bright, socially conscious, warm, creative, complicated individuals and I couldn't be prouder of them. Not because they did great in university and that was fantastic, but because that they have the courage to be who they are today.

Growing up, my kids played sports, took music lessons, worked in community theatre, made it through the high school years, and they all went on to university or trade school. They were kids, busy growing up. It wasn't always easy. We had friends and a supportive community, but what we didn't have was any transgender people in our lives that we knew of at the time.

There wasn't a lot of trans visibility on the screen or in any of the popular media my kids would have been growing up with, and this wasn't helpful for them and it wasn't helpful for me as a parent either, who desperately wanted my kids—sorry—to be the most empathetic, loving kids they could be, who stood for what they believed. And I also really wanted them to be happy.

As I think about my children, especially the two that are trans, I think about how much better their lives would have been, or would be today, even in the short time they've been alive, if they would have been able

to see themselves reflected more in the world around them as they grew up, and this brings me both tremendous pain and sadness.

It also makes me not only want to help create a space that's welcoming for them today, and for who they are, but a space that will help kids see all the beauty and diversity of people around them and within themselves.

We are always learning, or maybe more accurately, always catching up. We know how important it is to see yourself reflected in the books you read, in the media you take in, in movies and in radio. I think about my daughter—lots of people have spoken about the University of Manitoba, and I think about my daughter who would help in—she was the president of the student council for the computer science association and she would help on the day when the new students would come and she'd proudly dress as fem as possible and wear her buttons and a trans shirt. And kids would come up to her and they'd just feel so at home because they got to see someone, when they talked to my daughter. And she did that on purpose, because she wanted people to feel comfortable, and that took a lot of courage.

As the rights of two-spirit and transgender people are being stripped and attacked for the mere reason of their existence, we should be working hard to be on the right side of history in Manitoba and especially in the Prairies. We have an opportunity to do something now that we can look back on and be proud of instead of having to make amends and course-correct later.

Dignity, respect and safety should be a given for every person living in Manitoba. We're sending the wrong message when we pick and choose who gets to experience the freedom of living their lives openly and freely without persecution, violence and judgment. This is a right that should be, and must be, afforded to everybody.

As a mother of transgender children, I support Bill 208 to recognize an official day of transgender and two-spirit visibility. It has never been more important to support the transgender community and two-spirit community, particularly as we see a rise in dangerous rhetoric and spread of disinformation across Canada.

A day of visibility provides an opportunity to spread awareness about transgender people, inspire conversations that celebrate diversity and for trans folks to share their joy. I want my kids and all the

people living in Manitoba to feel safe and affirmed in who they are completely. And I really believe this transgender, two-spirit day of visibility would be a very important step in creating a more equitable Manitoba.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for that presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Hi, Kristie. Thank you so much.

It's very important that we have your perspective as a parent of trans individuals. It's very important that you share and you have a platform. Your kids must be really proud and it's wonderful to see parents who have been so supportive of their trans children growing up and, you know, trans people just want to live. And thank you for your words tonight.

**K. Schertzer:** Thank you very much, MLA Oxenham. They're very inspired to see you here, too, and I'm very inspired, too, so thank you for being here and doing what you do.

**MLA Lagassé:** So as a parent to a parent—I have five kids at home, and one recently—well, two years ago—decided that she was going to share and have the courage to say that she was a lesbian. And I know the kind of pressure that sometimes happens when that occurs and I appreciate the love you showed your children. And that's the response I had to mine, and so I kind of understand. And it's hard sometimes, as a parent, because of the way society treats people. So I'm a hundred per cent there with you, and thank you for what you're doing for your kids.

**The Chairperson:** Ms. Schertzer?

Any other questions?

Thank you so much for that presentation.

I will now call on Mr. Jude Yallowega.

Do you have any printed materials you want to share with the committee? Okay, then you can start your presentation, Jude.

**Jude Yallowega (Private Citizen):** Hi. I'm very honoured to be here to speak today. My name is Jude Yallowega. I am 25 years old. I am a transgender man and I was born in 1998 to a same-sex couple. They like to tell me I was one of the first in the province, but that might just be to make me feel special.

My mothers raised me in a fairly private kind of way. I didn't attend my first Pride celebration or

parade until I was 14 years old. My sister and I, growing up in our middle school from K to 8, we were the only kids there with queer parents that we knew of.

Growing up, I had one storybook that showed a family like mine and that was the widely banned and barred *Heather Has Two Mommies*. Nowadays, I go by Jude Yallowega but I also go by the name Miss Gender, which I think is fun.

\* (19:40)

I'm a drag performer who has been doing events in Winnipeg and in smaller towns around Manitoba as well for the last five years.

My adult life has been drastically changed when I came to the conclusion that I was not, in fact, a weird and ugly kind of girl, but that I was a flamboyant and strange and creative transgender man. These are things that are constantly shifting and changing in the way that I perceive myself and the way that many trans people perceive their genders.

I am very privileged to work in a place that respects my gender identity and to have family that, while they don't necessarily understand where I'm coming from or what I do, they can, at the very least, recognize that trans people, in general, are people. That is, unfortunately, the bare minimum that they can do, but that bare minimum is really what we need right now.

I'm a very big proponent of the idea that actions speak louder than words, but I also believe that words, in the current cultural context, are equally as important. We see right now the power that words have when it comes to belittling, demeaning, harassing trans, queer, two-spirit, non-binary people. I have partners who live in the United States and who live day to day in fear that their city government may just decide, actually, you can't get married now. You can't change your name. You can't change your gender.

And as someone who's been navigating those systems now, for myself, I can say that it is incredibly difficult and incredibly challenging. The bare minimum is not good enough, but it is the best we can do in some ways.

Transgender day of visibility and two-spirit day of visibility: the idea of being visible is very, very scary for myself. The idea of presenting myself in any capacity to the public is something that frightened me when I was growing up. In some ways, I love being the centre of attention. In other ways, the idea of being

known on an intimate level and to have someone understand who you are as a trans person is a terrifying thing.

You're never sure how someone is going to react. And in a lot of ways, drag has made that much easier for me. It's been a way to reclaim femininity that I was never able to embrace when I was growing up. It's been a way to make a persona that's larger than life, and that kind of persona and that kind of confidence that comes from performing the art of gender is something that makes other people happy, and it makes kids happy.

I have found a lot of joy and a lot of power in doing drag storytimes with my workplace, on my own, in all kinds of different venues around the city. But what has been incredibly special about reading stories about being queer to children is seeing myself in all of them and being able to choose from hundreds of books and show that every type of family that they see and every type of family that is represented on paper is a valued part of our society. And that people, regardless of how they identify or how they look, deserve a place on those pages and on the stages that I now get to occupy.

It's not just the one dusty copy of *Heather Has Two Mommies* on my bookshelf at home. It is an array of stories that we get to tell. And that kind of joy is what fuels me when, last September, I was being spit on in the front yard of the Legislative Building by the parents' rights movement. I've attended counter-protests and rallies for trans youth. I have tried to use my voice wherever possible, and that is what I'm here to do today.

I think that it's essential to utilize the words that we have and the privileges that we have to empower those that can't speak and that can't be visible and that can't live out loud in these flamboyant ways. That's what drag is for me and, I believe, for many of you, that's what your positions are. It's a way for you to uplift the voices of those who cannot speak for themselves.

So what I would encourage is the idea that while actions speak louder than words, silence only emboldens bigots and bullies. And when children are bullies, when children don't understand what a trans person is or what a queer person is, when they ostracize or exclude you, they're doing it because they don't know any better. When adults bully and belittle you, they do that with violence.

I have faced harassment from the Winnipeg Police Service, from border patrol, trying to enter the United States. I have faced harassment on the street in and out of drag. I did a story time at Henderson public library, where there were actual protestors who turned up with signs that were very poorly made and illegible, but signs nonetheless, because they felt that we, as queer adults, had no place to speak to children—children who may, in fact, grow up not to be exactly like the bigots that raised them.

So it is a challenge but it is something that I feel we need to do where possible: to use our voice, to use our privilege. And I would encourage as well, if you are planning to walk in the Pride parade or attend any of the events coming up, that you're letting your actions speak as loudly as the rainbow pins that you're wearing. I encourage you to go out and support trans art where possible, trans activism, support every two-spirit person that you meet because queerness in this city would not exist without the activism of queer people of colour and two-spirit individuals.

I'm a very, very lucky by-product of not only the cisgender lesbians that raised me and the multitude of women who, you know, encouraged me to be a strong girl growing up, but also to the amazing people around me in my adult life who keep me in check and keep me humble, but who've shown me that there is no wrong way to move through the world as a trans person. And that is—that's all I can really say.

So thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for that presentation.

Are there questions?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Yes, Jude, really quickly.

Again, I'm just so blown away by the folks that are in the room tonight who came to present, and the same goes for you, Jude. Even when you're presenting in drag, you're just—you have this presence about you that's so powerful, and I want to thank you for bringing that to all of us tonight and educating us.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** You're welcome to respond, Jude.

**J. Yallowega:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Cook:** Thank you for coming. I genuinely just appreciate your perspective and the emotional labour that it—you're doing in educating us.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Jude, would you like to respond?

**J. Yellowega:** It's—it is something that I'm very happy to do. And I'd also say if anybody is ever looking to engage in having trans people educate any group or any number of people, we're all here. There's more trans knowledge in the room right now than, I don't know, some people might ever find in their day-to-day lives.

We're very privileged to exist in this time and in this space, and I think that if you want to educate yourself on trans history and queer history, a lot of the people in this room can do a lot of that work and, you know, pay them.

That's the only other thing is—if you want to be bare-minimum ally, putting trans and two-spirit day of visibility into legislation is essential and very important. If you want to be a great ally, make it a bank holiday or give me money.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Are there any other questions?

Thank you so much for that presentation.

\* (19:50)

I will now call on Mx. Dieth de Leon from Bahaghari Pride Manitoba.

Do you have any written materials you want to share with the committee? No? Oh, yes. Okay.

Seven or eight? If we could get nine, that would be great.

Okay. You can start your presentation, Mx. de Leon.

**Dieth de Leon (Bahaghari Pride Manitoba):** Okay. First of all, I would like to thank you, Logan Oxenham, for introducing the Bill 208, and I would like to thank the committee members for being here and for opening your ears to listen to our voices—diverse voices. And I would like to thank everyone for being here to share our voices in solidarity.

Let me introduce myself first. I am a unapologetic person of Filipino descent, identify as a non-binary and an androgynous person. I use the pronouns he/him, they/them, siya and niya [*Tagalog non-gendered pronouns*].

I migrated in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada in 2015 from the Pearl of the Orient Seas, the Philippines. I founded The Queerpeg Project

Manitoba, a digital platform that supports the diverse two-spirit, queer plus, Black, Indigenous, people of colour community, and the founder of the newly grassroots not-for-profit organization that caters to the 2SLGBTQI+ Filipino and diverse community to pave the way where everyone is free to love, free to be and free to try.

Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act, the commemoration of days, weeks and months act, is amended to proclaim March 31 of each year as the two-spirit and transgender day of visibility. Whereas people who are two-spirit, transgender or non-binary are deserving of dignity and respect and freedom to live their lives fully and with meaning as they choose so, because everyone is unique and that we are all human beings who breathe the same air, drink the same water, walk the same native land and that we are all children of this earth.

Whereas throughout history and across of—sorry, across culture and societies around the world, there have always existed people who have challenged binary conceptions of gender. Long before the arrival of colonial forces, the Philippines boasted a rich tapestry of culture and society, each with its unique customs and attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

Filipinos, before the influence of the Spaniards between 1565 to 1898, were animists, believing that all things had a distinct spiritual essence.

In addition, the Philippines' pre-colonial society is thought to have been matriarchal before turning patriarchal, reflecting gender multiplicity, plurality and diversity.

Women were highly esteemed due to their role in procreation, which bestowed upon them not only the ability to give life but also an extended capacity for healing. There was power in the feminine.

Pre-colonial Filipino societies recognized and revered spiritual leaders known as babaylans or priestesses. These revered figures engage in various rituals and ceremonies and were often believed to possess a spiritual duality embodying both masculine and feminine energies.

Babaylan, or priestess, were not strictly born females; some were born males, while some may fall into the middle, or people with diverse sex characteristics, or what we call intersex. Their existence challenged the binary concepts of gender and sexuality imposed by the later colonizers, emphasizing a holistic view that included the full spectrum of human identity.

Discrimination against gender, at least what they define gender to be, was nonexistent in the Philippines. Pre-colonial Philippines acknowledged the existence of asog or bayok, male individuals who transcended conventional gender roles. It was also thought that gender transcendence extended not just to mortals but also to immortals, with several dimly remembered folklore deities identified as queer.

A prevalent belief is that our forebears did not find it necessary to categorize individuals strictly as either male or female. Instead, they embraced the concept of balance, acknowledging the simultaneous presence of feminine and masculine energies, hence, the gender-neutral pronouns.

Pre-colonial Philippines painted a portrait of society that celebrated diversity and embraced a fluid understanding of gender and sexuality. This historical narratives challenge contemporary perception, highlighting that the acceptance of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals is not a recent development but an intrinsic part of the country's covered heritage.

It is important to be aware of the widespread unqueering and dequeering of our people and neighbouring land. And as we reconnect with this rich past, let us carry forward the lessons of inclusivity, understanding and appreciation for the diverse identities that have shaped the Philippines and other cultures and societies like the treaty territories for centuries.

In conclusion, amid a surge in anti-trans hate and harmful government policies, being visible has become increasingly challenging and risky. Colonial and conservative harmful views have no place in a progressive and inclusive Manitoba. Visibility is a balancing act. To be safely visible is a privilege for everyone and that's not up to debate.

Therefore, the amended Bill 208 act, throughout Manitoba, the two-spirit and transgender day of visibility, and next year, March 31 is to be known as the two-spirit and transgender day of visibility.

As an unapologetic Asian-Filipino descent, a transqueer, non-binary person of colour, I affirm that two-spirit and transgender lives are sacred and should always be respected, valued and cherished.

I would like to end this presentation with an amazing quote by Bahaghari Pride Manitoba in Tagalog and English terms: Iba't iba man ang ating kulay at wika, tayo'y iisa sa isang bahaghari; although

our colours and languages are different, we are one under the rainbow.

Maraming salamat po. *[Thank you very much.]*  
Thank you, everyone.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for that presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Hi and congratulations on the formation of Bahaghari Pride. It's just wonderful to just see our community expand and, you know, cast a net, you know, so wide. We're such a big and beautiful community and I just loved your presentation so much. Thank you for being here tonight. I really appreciate it. Miigwech.

**The Chairperson:** Mx. de Leon, you're welcome to respond if you'd like.

Sorry?

**D. de Leon:** Was that a question?

**The Chairperson:** It was not. No, there haven't been any questions tonight.

\* (20:00)

**MLA Bereza:** Thanks so much for sharing with us tonight, and thank you so much for your passion. It really came through with your presentation, and I appreciate that.

Thank you so much.

**D. de Leon:** Yes. No, before I go I just want to thank you again, and I just want to—and, everyone, as long as we live, remember that we keep transitioning. So learning, learn, always learning.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much.

I think there's one more question, if you're open to it.

**MLA Dela Cruz:** Isa pa. Maraming salamat, kapuwa. *[One more. Many thanks, compatriot.]*

I am so, so thankful that you've taken the time to share so deeply from your identity, from our shared identity. And, you know, queerness and Filipino heritage are so inseparable.

And so thank you so much. I don't think that we can repeat that enough.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you.



I will now call on Ms. Kristine Barr.

Do you have any printed materials you want to share with the committee?

**Kristine Barr (Canadian Union of Public Employees):** You know, I wish I had brought more materials. I have one copy of a guide I can give to you, but it's on CUPE.ca, where you can find it, if you'd like to take it.

**The Chairperson:** So you can proceed with your presentation, Ms. Barr.

**K. Barr:** My name is Kristine Barr, and I use pronouns she and her, and I'm speaking tonight on behalf of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

I'm a member for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and I'm a lawyer who is currently working as the human rights representative with CUPE. I'm also married to a trans man, and we just celebrated our 18th wedding anniversary last week.

CUPE Manitoba president Gina McKay wasn't able to be here tonight, but wanted me to pass on her strong support of this bill. CUPE is Canada's largest union, representing more than 750,000 union members across Canada. In Manitoba, CUPE represents approximately 37,000 members working in health-care facilities, personal-care homes, home care, school divisions, municipal services, social services, child-care centres, public utilities, libraries and family emergency services. And I'm here to speak in favour of Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act.

It is so very important to recognize commemorative days like this and to have more strong visibility for both two-spirit and transgender folks. It's particularly true when we look at the alarming rise of far-right ideology, including the anti-trans rhetoric and the policies that we've seen cropping up across the country.

As the largest union in Manitoba, CUPE has been very clear in their message that hate has no place in our workplace and no place in our communities. CUPE works to defend human rights and joins in solidarity to ensure equality and respect for all of our members. There is no space for hate, and CUPE fully supports 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education and policies.

So I'm so proud to see this bill coming forward and being introduced by the NDP government. It takes real courage to stand up strong and proud for human rights, and it's necessary and important work that you are all undertaking together.

It has been shameful to witness that there's been members opposite of the NDP government that did not make any advancements for 2SLGBTQIA+ Manitobans in the almost eight years that they were in government. This bill is long overdue.

It's also been shameful to watch what other provincial governments are doing within Canada. In New Brunswick, the introduction of policies requiring parents to consent before a student can go by a different name or a different pronoun at school. This means that education workers, our CUPE members, are expected to out young people to their parents, many of whom who might not be safe at home.

We saw Saskatchewan follow suit and introducing similar policies. And when a court granted an injunction, temporarily blocking the implementation of the policy, given the risk of irreparable harm, the Saskatchewan premier used the notwithstanding clause, which is a loophole that allows governments to override rights under the Charter.

And earlier this year, we saw Alberta announce the most regressive anti-trans policies we've ever seen. These policies bar youth from accessing gender-affirming care. They ban trans women from women's sports, require parental consent for new names or pronouns at school, require the ministry of education to now directly oversee teaching materials on gender and sexuality, and to end mandatory sex education so only students whose parents opt in will have access to critical life-saving health information.

So these Conservative governments are sending the message that queer and trans people are not free to express themselves, and this can erode their sense of belonging and safety. Across the country, CUPE has members who work in schools and libraries who have received harassing phone calls, discrimination, and had to deal with very aggressive protesters.

We know that Conservative politicians and far-right groups are trying to divide workers and communities by spreading disinformation about 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. They are targeting trans youth—I've lost my spot; give me one moment—they are targeting trans youth to distract us from their anti-worker policies and spreading hate amongst—about vulnerable people for political gain.

So what your government is doing by introducing this bill and moving forward with the formal recognition of March 31st as the two-spirit and transgender day of visibility, this will send a very strong message that in Manitoba, our government stands up for human rights and will not be swayed by hate and intolerance.

Two-spirit, trans and non-binary rights are human rights.

The action that you will take by passing this bill provides Manitobans with the real opportunity to celebrate and support full and visible participation in Manitoba of the people within our communities who are two-spirit, who are transgender or who are non-binary, and will further equality and human-rights gains.

On a personal note, I wanted to thank the honourable member, Logan Oxenham, for standing up for what is right and introducing this bill. It takes real courage to express your authentic self, and I know this is not easy to do, and that seeing those who spread misinformation and lies about you and our community feels very hurtful and can affect your family and your own sense of safety. So thank you.

I was an elected school trustee with the Winnipeg School Division for 16 years, from 1998 to 2014. And as a school trustee, I introduced a motion on human rights and anti-homophobia education that led to training for all staff to ensure that they had tools to address discrimination, bullying and homophobia, and to effectively ensure that they understood their fiduciary duties to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for all students, including queer students.

And we also created a budget for age-appropriate 2SLGBTQIA+ books in all 79 school libraries, like Heather Has Two Mommies, that we heard about earlier. But it was a very difficult struggle to get there, and it took its toll. There was a local radio station that used the airwave to spread hate and misinformation and vitriol, much like we're seeing happen in other jurisdictions.

They had labelled my motion as a gay agenda to use the school system to recruit children into mine and my community's lifestyle. They gave out my personal contact information over the airwaves, so I started receiving harassing phone calls and threatening letters in my home mailbox. The police had to give me a special fob so I could get in touch with them quickly if necessary. This was before equal marriage laws were in place and had been passed, and before same-sex adoption rights were in place in Canada.

While the committee had never met, they recognized the real need for change to counter this type of hate, and I'm pleased to see that that isn't happening at your hearings here tonight, so there has been some

changes that have been occurring. I don't think that's the way all the way across Canada, though.

I would be remiss if I also didn't recognize the honourable minister, Lisa Naylor, who's not here tonight, but for the work that she had done in 2015 when she introduced policies to accommodate and protect transgender and gender-non-conforming students, that she furthered the work that I had begun earlier. And I wanted to thank her also for her courage and her leadership, on the record.

So, in conclusion, I am here on behalf of CUPE Manitoba to provide our unequivocal support of this bill and to support members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and young people in our lives. We never know what they are going through, and this type of visibility can and will save lives.

Manitoba must continue to be a safe place for all, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, and by proclaiming March 31st as a two-spirit and transgender day of 'visibility'—day of visibility, this is an action that will help to make Manitoba a safer and more inclusive space for all.

I also just wanted to note before I ended that at our recent CUPE Manitoba convention, where we had hundreds of delegates come together, they unanimously passed a resolution to lobby the provincial government to add gender expression specifically as a protected characteristic under the Human Rights Code. I know I'm not there on that purpose today, but I thought I would just put that on the record here tonight as well.

So, that being said, I will end my comments, subject to any questions you might have.

\* (20:10)

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for that presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Thank you, Kristine, for that presentation, and I do—I have a few comments that I just want to make. Congratulations on your 18th wedding anniversary. That's wonderful. Thank you for your work in CUPE. I know unions have led the way in a lot of human rights cases, and so thank you for that work.

My—I do have a question for you. What can affirming—what can an affirming workplace do for

workers and the workplaces themselves?  
[interjection]

**The Chairperson:** Ms. Barr.

**K. Barr:** My apologies; thank you, with respect to the Chair.

Workplaces can make sure that they are working with any trans employees, for example, to make sure that they are welcomed and they are respected and work with them as they put in place a transition plan for employees. The resource I was talking about earlier that we have at cupe.ca is called Bargaining Beyond the Binary: A negotiating guide for trans inclusion and gender diversity. And it gives some concrete examples of language that be—can be negotiated into contracts in unionized environments.

But it's also a resource that all workplaces could utilize when they're looking at trying to put those types of things into place. So ensuring that there are policies, ensuring that they're following the lead of any trans employees that are coming forward to make sure they're moving at the speed they want that to be happening, and that there isn't any type of gossip or anything like that happening within the workplace.

**The Chairperson:** Are there other questions?

**Mrs. Cook:** Hi, there. Not really a question, but just thank you for coming and for taking time out of your night and preparing a presentation. You're the second person to mention that gender expression is not a protected characteristic under the Manitoba Human Rights Code.

I didn't know that. I realize that's an incredible privilege I have in not knowing that and not everybody has that privilege. So that was new to me. Thank you for mentioning it. And thanks for coming.

**The Chairperson:** Ms. Barr, would you like to respond?

**K. Barr:** Very briefly, just, yes.

There's—of course it's a ground that is still protected even though it's not named, as a—and people can bring forward human rights complaints. But it's really important to have that specific recognition and naming that so many other jurisdictions in Canada have done.

Manitoba was a leader when it came to adding sexual orientation into The Human Rights Code in 1987, and Manitoba's fallen behind. And so it's time to now do that catch-up, particularly when we see the rise of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate that's occurring.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you. Are there other questions from the committee? No?

Thank you so much for that presentation.

Next up we have Mr. Caleb Clay. Do you have any written materials you want to distribute?

**Caleb Clay (Private Citizen):** No, I do not.

**The Chairperson:** That is okay. You can start your presentation, Mr. Clay.

**C. Clay:** Hello, everybody. My name is Caleb Clay. I am a 29-year-old trans man, drag queen and harm-reduction worker. I work in sexual health outreach and education at Sunshine House.

I'm here today to voice my support for the recognition of transgender and two-spirit visibility day and to share a little of myself with you to show you what visibility has done for me. I grew up in Stonewall, Manitoba, about 50—or, 40 minutes north of the city. I was raised in a conservative Catholic household and much of my socialization as a young child revolved around church.

Even when it didn't, Stonewall is a very conservative place, and growing up I didn't know I was queer. I grew up hating my body and, by extension, myself for reasons that I couldn't put into words. I liked the idea of dresses, but hated getting them as gifts or being forced to wear one by someone else.

Looking back, I realize now that I hated the idea that someone would look at me and think, girl, and decide that I should wear dresses or skirts. I didn't know that people could be gay or trans until I was around nine or 10 and I saw a trans woman on TV. My dad and the other religious adults around me would say that we should try to save queer people but never condone or accept their lifestyles.

When I was around 13 or 14 my aunt got married and two of her friends, a gay couple, sat with us. So those were the first gay people I'd ever met. They were funny; they were sweet, kind, happy to talk with me and hear all about my life, even though I was just a little kid, and I realized that they were just like everybody else. They weren't the monsters that they had been made out to be to me. They did not talk to me about their sexuality or their lifestyle, and I realized that maybe I should learn to think for myself.

When I was around 15 a few of my friends started coming out as gay and bisexual, and at this point I had talked to my mom about it out of my dad's earshot,

and she had told me to form my own opinions and encouraged me to seek more information.

I started watching the show *1 Girl 5 Gays* on MTV late at night after my dad was asleep. It was like a panel show where they had several gay men and one girl, and she would ask questions about love and sex. And that's how I learned everything that I knew at that point about queer people that wasn't from the people I knew directly in my life.

In grade 11, two—my two best friends came out as trans men in the same year, and I learned a lot about how to support them, and they told me a lot about their experiences with gender. I had a lot of questions and could not explain the feeling inside when we talked about it, but it got me thinking. And then two years later when I was 19 and moved out of the house, I finally realized when I had distance and time to process and heal, that the whole time I had been trans, and that was that feeling.

Initially, I came out as agender, which was difficult as most of my friends in university had never heard of non-binary, third or absent genders. I had to do a lot of teaching and explaining, and that has continued for a long time.

Then, a few years later, after learning about drag as an art form from RuPaul's *Drag Race*, I started going to the local queer bars and fell in love with our local drag scene. The performers were talented, funny, generally sweet and unabashedly queer. I thought seeing them, hey, maybe I could do this, too.

And I started performing at 21. I've now been doing drag for nearly eight years as Moxie Cotton, and through meeting so many other queer people, who are queer in so many different ways, I was able to find myself finally and came out as a trans man at 26, and a year later I took my first testosterone ingestion—injection, officially starting my medical transition.

Through drag I have seen first-hand the impact that the incredibly visible nature of our queerness has had around those around us. I've had friends express to me that they found the courage to come out or to question their identity after seeing me live my truth.

When groups of drag performers started visiting Fort Frances, Ontario, and doing shows, the people there, after seeing their friends and relations supporting this big—these big gay drag queens started coming out of the closet en masse. They didn't know that they were safe before, but when they saw us

performing, and performing gender on the stage of the earth, that they too would be supported and loved by their communities.

And last year for Pride, myself and another trans performer went to visit Collège Churchill High School, and we performed their school division's first-ever drag show. This year when they asked us back, the organizer told me that after that event, they saw an immediate and almost complete drop of homophobic and transphobic bullying, which had been a big problem for them.

For me, it was only through conversations that I had with the friends that I made through drag that I was able to find myself. It was only through the visibility of my brave friends in high school that I even made it to university and was able to explore myself, and it is only through having strong examples of joyful, happy trans people that I am here before you.

There are people all over rural Manitoba with similar stories and feelings to me. To not know what you are and why you hate yourself so much is incredibly isolating, depressing and damaging. I couldn't name my feelings, and so I tried to ignore them, push them down and work through them, but it wasn't 'til I realized that they were something to be honoured, nurtured and loved and embraced that I began to heal, feel positively about life and myself and truly live.

This wouldn't have been possible without the examples that I've been fortunate enough to have, and other kids and adults deserve to have that too.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for that presentation, Mr. Clay.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Hi, Caleb. I just want to thank you so much for your work that you do at Sunshine House, such an important, important place for folks to come and just be themselves without judgment. So your work there is so vital and so important.

And it takes a lot of moxie to come appear and share your store. And I love Moxie Cotton, such a great drag name.

Thank you for sharing it with us and thank you for being here tonight.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond, Mr. Clay?

**C. Clay:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Any other questions?

**MLA Lagassé:** I, too, would like to thank you for your presentation this evening. Sorry that I was a little bit sneezing and coughing a bit there. But yes, thank you so much for having the courage to come and speak your story tonight.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond, Mr. Clay?

**C. Clay:** Thank you, again.

**The Chairperson:** Any other questions from the committee?

Thank you so much for that.

\* (20:20)

Next up, we have Mx. Davey Cole from Sunshine House. Do you have any printed materials you want to share with the committee?

**Davey Cole (Sunshine House):** I don't; I'm using my phone. I got nothing printed.

**The Chairperson:** That's very okay. You can start your presentation, Mx. Cole.

**D. Cole:** Hello. My name is Davey Francis Cole. I am a performer, a partner, a friend, a cousin, and I am kin to beautiful two-spirit aunties and elders. I am a community leader, and I am a two-spirit, trans, non-'biney'-non-binary, queer party boy. I am here to show my support for Bill 208, not only personally but as the representative of Sunshine House.

Sunshine House is a resource drop-in centre that is queer- and BIPOC-led, historically and presently, supporting our 2SLGBTQIA+ community here on Treaty 1 territory. Sunshine House serves almost 2,000 people a month through multiple programs, serving meals, housing our relatives and keeping folks alive at MOPS. This is important to note right now, because the majority of people who run programs, feed or lead, advocate and work the front lines at Sunshine House are two-spirit or trans or queer or a fun mixture of all those things.

The Like That program at Sunshine House is a queer drop-in space that came into existence in 2014 out of necessity. Two-spirited and trans people initiated this program to create a safe space where we could gather as a community to laugh, to grieve, to create and to support each other continuously. This story is not unique to Sunshine House or this city; it is

our collective story. We have always taken care of each other.

As two-spirit, trans and non-binary individuals, we experience higher rates of mental health challenges, suicide and death—due to colonial and discriminatory systems that marginalize our stories and our lives. In response, we create our own spaces, communities, parties and homes. We do this in defiance and in honour of those who have—we have lost, because we deserve to live, thrive and to be alive.

This resilience must be honoured because it has kept so many of us here, able to tell our stories, to remember, to dream and to keep moving forward. Personally, I have been privileged to find two-spirit elders, aunties, cousins and my chosen family, who have kept me alive.

Growing up, I lacked the words to describe who I am. When I finally found those words, it was terrifying. My upbringing and beginnings did not have words for me for a reason. I knew there wasn't room for me there, and a story—this is a story so many of us have begun with. Yes, and my journey took a few turns through that world that didn't have a room for me, but eventually I found my family, or they found me, which I am forever grateful for, and I am here because of them.

This will to survive, to believe in a world for us, to keep living for it and to keep each other living for it, and to continually demand our rights, is intrinsic to who we are, who we've always been; and this should be honoured and recognized loudly. It should reach every child who has yet to find the words to describe themselves, so they never feel alone, they never know a world without them.

Our two-spirit, trans and non-binary kin deserve to grow old, and our stories must live on. This bill to commemorate these stories—our stories, our lives—is crucial, because the whole community across the world has fought for so long and continues to fight to keep our people alive, with love, rage and our defiant, powerful joy. This must be remembered. Our ancestors, those who we've lost, and our living relatives deserve to be honoured, to be celebrated. In doing so we can help ensure that our future generations may live.

So thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you so much for that presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Thank you so much for your presentation. And, again, thank you for the work you do at Like That and Sunshine House, and the work that you do with MOPS is so important.

You know, community is really—they look for signals from spaces to feel safe in. And when you walk into Like That, or when you walk into Sunshine House and see the Like That folks, you feel that. You feel welcome, you feel safe. And that's such a gift to the city and to the province.

So thank you for that.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond, Mx. Cole?

**D. Cole:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Are there any—MLA Bereza.

**MLA Bereza:** Thank you so much for your presentation. There's so many community leaders here tonight, and I just want to thank you for coming out and being a leader in the community here, and speaking the truth about yourself, your family and what you've been through.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Are there any other questions?

Thank you so much for that.

Next on our list is Ms. Ashley Gawne. Do you have any handouts you want—

**Ashley Gawne (Klinik Community Health):** I do not.

**The Chairperson:** No? Okay, that's fine.

So you can start your presentation, Ms. Gawne, and you are from Klinik Community Health.

**A. Gawne:** I am, yes. Thank you for the opportunity to talk. I do not have a formal presentation, so I'm just going to speak from my heart.

And my voice might give out because I've been working all day serving community. Something of note: thank you very much, as well, Logan, for introducing this bill, as visibility is very important. It was something that I was missing for most of my life. I grew up in the '80s. It was difficult to—and especially in a rural area—it was really difficult to see any kind of representation that reflected back who I feel that I was, or didn't necessarily provide language for me to even figure that out.

Moving through that space I felt, especially in the '80s, like, the gay F-word was thrown around a lot, which pushed me more into the closet and made me disassociate more from who I might be.

Fast forward to the future, where there is a lot more visibility in the world. I grew up in the '80s, again, where there were a lot of movies that made fun of people like me, like Ace Ventura, or The Crying Game, which is quite horrible for a young trans woman watching that. To feel that rejection by society compressed into movie form was very palpable for me, and it was difficult for me to move forward with that. So that just forced me more in the closet.

Luckily, I found the music scene in Winnipeg in which I could get my anger out, but that was only—lasted so long. You can only beat the drum so much until you get tired.

And again, that leads me to becoming a part of the Trans Health Klinik. Before I had gotten a job there, I obviously was a client there. I was lucky I started before COVID, and before then there was about a three-month wait-list, and at that time, I was chomping at the bit to get medical care for my needs.

So within that, I felt that that was forever because it took me forever to make up my mind, and it took me forever to take that step forward. And it took me forever to even find visibility, again for people in my community, and that visibility really pushed me forward, seeing a lot of positive representation in media, on You Tube. There's lots of trans people who put themselves on that platform and provided a lot of nuanced kind of ways of looking—approaching life as a transgender person.

We weren't just freaks or outcasts anymore. We were normalized. We were intellectuals, but we'd run from—we come from a lot of different backgrounds. So, having that intersectionality available to me online really helped me move forward with that.

So, to all the community here I'm very inspired by everyone's words. To the community outside of this building, I'm very inspired. Without them I would have not been able to take these steps forward and I might not be here anymore, because it was a hard life.

I'm old; I'm tired. Did I mention I'm tired? It's—yes—so, within that, transitioning gave me some strength, and I wanted to give back to my community.

So, I saw a job opening at Klinik, specifically when they moved into the new building and they were looking to change things up a bit more, and maybe got a little bit more money at that time.

I took on the peer support worker role there, and at that time I was the only trans person there, the only person who had that visibility to people walking through those doors.

And I found that incredibly shocking when I'd gone there because, yes, it's a trans health clinic. There should be more trans people working there. But, unfortunately, the way the medical system is, it is barely able to retain people in positions that are cis or like just pertain to any kind of thing.

And I should note that I've been working in the medical community for about 26 years. I was a health-care aide previously before joining Klinik as a peer support worker as I was putting myself through university and trying to empower myself with more language, taking psychology and women and gender studies, despite growing up somewhat punk anarchists. I learnt more nuances in language within that scope.

And then my experience working in the trans health—or, in the Trans Health Klinik really opened my eyes to a lot of things and the potential that could be out there.

\* (20:30)

I remember getting hired and they wanted me to step beyond what the previous peer-support worker was doing, because they didn't have enough capacity—the peer-support worker wasn't doing peer support. They were doing intakes, because they lacked very many, any—enough capacity to take on the small amount of people that were coming there to—seeking medical transition.

And, unfortunately, they're bottlenecked through there because the medical community gets nervous when you put the word trans in front of someone seeking HRT or any kind of gender-affirming care that is not cisgender.

So within that scope, I saw an opportunity to expand beyond that, so I've tried to create more capacity for a community coming to Trans Health Klinik and trying to hear more voices on what needs to be seen around that, and holding people accountable with—both within the medical community and throughout Winnipeg specifically, or within Manitoba.

So with that opportunity, I'm very grateful to use my visibility, and I'm encouraged by the bill that is being passed, because that shows that we're being taken seriously. We're normalized; we aren't people in a movie to make fun of any more.

So with that being said, yes, I've seen—I was very—and again, going back on what a—when I began there was only a three-month waiting list, but now I think we've been able to dial it back to maybe ten months. And this is just shaky. And it fluctuates too, because we've tried to attack the numbers that were well into four or five hundred, at times, on our wait-list there.

And, of course, we did not have enough capacity to serve that community. We did get some more funding with the previous government, which was kind of embarrassing when they gave it to us, posted it online, and later on that afternoon they took it off. So that was more of a performatory thing, or less of a performatory thing and just kind of like treating us, again, like we're someone to put in—or something to put in the closet or to be ashamed of.

But we got extra money, and that helped us open up more doors, and now we have—we were able to hire more people, hire specifically trans people. We have a trans nurse that is able to reflect back to people when they're coming in. So seeing someone that is from community speaks volumes.

I know when I took my intake I was unaware of who I was talking to, whether they were trans or not. It seemed like a lot of cis people. I'm great for allies, but there's something to be said when you walk into a room and you see another trans person. At that—you can have that unspoken relation, right, that you have that kind of background.

And I may note that, like, as I was coming out and coming to terms with who I was, I used to think that I felt this way alone and that it was just something for me, and I was shocked, but not really shocked; I was very warmed to see—hear other people from various intersections of life sharing the same perspectives that I had had. So within that, I strived to help community around that kind of thing. And, of course, pushing for more, and—but it's difficult to do that within the system that we're in.

We are—at Klinik we're pushing for, specifically within trans health, we've had a past nurse, Gail, who had left us for a teaching position at the U of M. We've been able to intersect our education platforms through that, and then Gail has also come back to help us lead that, and we're holding, on June 15, the first open call—

we did an open call-out for physicians and providers to come join us at a low nominal fee of \$100 to try and regulate this.

Because it's necessary for providers to have initiative, to want to reach out, to want to help the trans and two-spirit, non-binary community within our needs. So it's a long and difficult struggle and it's a labour of love for most of us.

So, yes, with that being said, I'm very grateful that this bill is being passed and that there is visibility and more of us will be seen, and I would like to—I'm sorry, I'm kind of all over the place—I'm very tired; I spoke all day with clients, so it's—I'm burning out hard core. But I'm giving you my last breaths and I'm—and my gratitude for showing and being who you are, specifically Logan and various other members who are non-binary or two-spirit on the board, or, not on the board, sorry.

Now I'm used to speaking—I also serve on boards, so now I'm kind of, like, all over the place. But, yes, it encourages me to see more representation, and I see more—that it also lights more fires and brings more—and helps people lean into who they are and helping—I'm going over, aren't I?

I'm done, the end.

Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for that presentation.

Are there questions from the committee?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Ashley, your work at the Trans Health Clinic, you're a lifesaver. You are the first point of contact for many people, like you said, who feel so alone. You went from a place of feeling so alone and you stepped right into a space where you're opening your arms and welcoming people into our beautiful community.

So thank you for that work in creating that space. Appreciate it.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond?

**A. Gawne:** I would.

Thank you very much, and I appreciate the kind words.

**Mrs. Cook:** Hi, Ashley. Fellow '80s kid, can confirm very little holds up from that era, a lot of it is actively harmful, and I am sorry that you had to grow up on that.

But thank you for the work that you're doing today. And you talked a lot about the importance of visibility, but a lot of that is thanks to you, right, and to people in your community. So, job well done and thank you for coming tonight.

You said you had nothing prepared, and you keep saying you're tired but you sure don't look tired. It was very well done.

**The Chairperson:** Would you like to respond, Mx. Gawne?

**A. Gawne:** Oh, thank you very much for your kind words, and my condolences to you also for growing up in the '80s. It was tough.

**The Chairperson:** Are there any other questions from the committee?

Thank you so much.

Next up we have Mr. Ally Gonzalo. Mr. Gonzalo? We—if Mr. Gonzalo is online, could you turn your camera on and—if Mr. Gonzalo is online, if you could unmute yourself.

\* \* \*

**The Chairperson:** Okay. Well, with that, that concludes the list of presenters I have before me.

We will now proceed with—oh, sorry. Is—does the bill sponsor—oh, we will now proceed with clause by clause of Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended).

Does the bill's sponsor, the honourable member for Kirkfield Park, have an opening statement?

**Mr. Oxenham:** Yes. I just briefly wanted to take this opportunity to thank, from the bottom of my heart, all you folks who came to present tonight and to share your personal stories and your wisdom with all of us here. It's a really special opportunity that we have as a community to come together and have something to celebrate.

Too often we've had times of sorrow in our community and we've had to share some pretty bad news with each other. But I think that this bill provides us with an opportunity to express our joy and to show people what trans and two-spirit joy looks like.

So thank you all for coming and thank you for very much for your presentations.

**The Chairperson:** We thank the member.



Does any other member wish to make an opening statement on Bill 208?

\* (20:40)

**MLA Lagassé:** So my—is more for you, Mr. Oxenham. I would like to thank you for bringing this forward. I really feel that this is history making; this is fantastic. I see you as I see everyone in this room right now and thank you so much for doing this.

**The Chairperson:** During the consideration of a bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

The time being 8:41, what is the will of the committee?

**Some Honourable Members:** Committee rise.

**The Chairperson:** It's the will of the committee to rise.

**COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 8:41 p.m.**

#### WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Re: Bill 208

I support bill 208 to recognize an official day of transgender visibility because it is important that we support this community, particularly as more and more places globally strip them of the right to be seen, to have the same dignity and respect of all citizens, and to have the basic rights of being a human. Canada has long been seen as a progressive country and yet with greater frequency, we see groups arming themselves in a fight against a marginalized group of people who simply want no more than to be treated equally, and to be left alone to live. We see books being banned, we see conversations about gender and sexuality threatened, and each of these actions threaten all of us. Trans rights are human rights and if we can strip even a single person of rights, it's a slippery slope until the rights of all are in peril. I support our trans family, trans friends, trans strangers, and all trans and gender divergent people. They deserve to be recognized and to know that their cis community recognizes them.

Aimee Rice

Re: Bill 208

I am writing in support of Bill 208.

A society that considers itself free and as an example to the rest of the world as Manitoba and, indeed, Canada at large does, cannot claim this while disregarding the rights of the most vulnerable.

At a time when two spirit and trans people are being demonized and having their rights reduced and eliminated in other provinces for what amounts to political expedience and appeasement of the closed-minded, it's more important than ever for government to stand up for every Manitoban, and every Canadian. Not to elevate one group over another but to say that, yes, these people matter just as much as anyone else, and should enjoy the same rights, freedoms and care as anyone else.

For that reason, I support this bill.

Chris Allinotte

Re: Bill 208

As a mother of a transgender teenager, I support Bill 208 to recognize an official Day of Transgender Visibility. It has never been more important to support the transgender community, particularly as we see a rise in dangerous rhetoric and spread of disinformation about trans children across Canada. A day of visibility provides an opportunity to spread awareness about transgender people, inspire conversations that celebrate diversity, and for trans folks to share their joy. I want my son to grow up in a Manitoba that supports him to feel safe, seen and affirmed in his identity. A Transgender Day of Visibility would be an important step to creating a more equitable Manitoba.

Sara Tarrant

Re: Bill 208

I support Bill 208 to recognize March 31 as Two-Spirit and Transgender Visibility Day. As Manitobans, we must support every Manitoban. We are stronger together, when we recognize and celebrate each member of our communities, especially those who face daily systemic oppression and have been historically oppressed.

As the rights of two-spirit and transgender people are being stripped and attacked for the mere reason of their existence, we should be working hard to be on the right side of history. We have an opportunity to do something now that we can look back on and be proud of, instead of having to make amends and course-correct later. Dignity, respect, and safety should be a given for every person living in Manitoba. We are sending the wrong message when we pick and choose who gets to experience the freedom of living their lives openly and freely without fear of persecution, violence, and judgment. This is a right that should be, and must be, afforded to everyone.

Let's celebrate March 31 as the Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility. More than a celebration, this day will also be an important show of solidarity so that two-spirit and trans individuals can

feel the love and support of their allies while living every day as their authentic selves.

Visibility removes isolation, builds community, makes space for joy, and promotes inclusion. Quite frankly, positive visibility saves lives. Let's show our two-spirit and trans children, partners, loved ones, and neighbours that their gender identity should be, and is, celebrated. Isn't that something we want for all of us?

Trans rights are human rights. It's that simple. I support our trans family, trans friends, trans community members, and all trans and gender-diverse people. Let's foster conversations, share joy, and celebrate positive affirmations of the diversity that makes our province what it is.

Abiola Agbayewa

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings  
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

**<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>**