

REPEAL BILL 137:

Saskatchewan Speaks Up for Trans Youth

Collective Resistance to Saskatchewan's
Bill 137: The Parents' Bill of Rights

Saskatchewan shares land with Indigenous and Métis nations, including homelands of the Métis and six treaty territories (2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10). The researchers conducted their work from Treaty 6 territory, the homelands of the Cree, Saulteaux, Dene, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, Blackfoot, and Métis people, with letters coming from across Treaty lands within and beyond the province. We recognize the value in coming together to engage in truth telling, the work of reconciliation, and the work of cultural humility, as well as the need to engaged in the ongoing work of truth and reconciliation, especially in our schools, and as it impacts Two Spirit, Indigiqueer and other gender and sexually diverse children and youth.

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Ethics

This research was approved by the Community Research Ethics Office (CREO) (<https://communityresearchethics.ca/>). Some quotations have been modified for clarity. Questions about this research can be directed to Dr. Rachel Loewen Walker at rl.walker@usask.ca

FORWARD

The personal is political.

Bill 137, and the effects it is having on the queer and trans community, particularly its ban on third-party educational resources, has always felt immensely personal to me, both as a gay man and as an educator.

Thinking back to the emergency session, Saskatchewan's first in nearly 20 years, I can't help but feel that I was elected with a purpose, and that I was in the right place at the right time when Scott Moe's Saskatchewan Party government chose to attack the queer and trans community by forcing through Bill 137 using the notwithstanding clause. When I learned we were being called back to debate this bill, I knew we would need to lift up as many community voices as possible in opposition to the Sask. Party's then-supermajority and their use of the notwithstanding clause.

And so, alongside my 13 colleagues, we sent the call far and wide for community members to write letters, submit impact statements, and share how Bill 137 would harm queer and trans youth in our province. You, the community, delivered! We received nearly 600 letters that have been carefully analyzed in the report you are about to read.

As the first openly gay MLA elected in Saskatchewan, I was incredibly proud to rise and speak for nearly six hours on the floor of the legislature, both on behalf of my 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and for every young queer person in our province who did not have a voice in this policy creation. I was also proud to stand alongside Sask NDP MLA colleagues who spoke for six, even seven hours at a time, raising up these voices.

The impacts of Bill 137 are still being felt. Most recently, at the Saskatchewan Sexual Assault Information Centre's 50th Anniversary gala on May 30th 2025, it was noted that it had been 26 months since their educators were allowed to provide age-appropriate consent and bodily autonomy education in Saskatchewan schools. That's thousands of children who have been denied access to information that could protect them from abusive



Photo by Heywood Yu / Saskatoon StarPhoenix

situations. One lawyer, who primarily works on child abuse cases, shared how often children reference the puppets SSAIC uses during this education in their victim impact statements. The continued banning of third party educators is unacceptable.

I also know that Bill 137 is being felt deeply in our schools. Teachers have been forced into a "don't ask, don't tell" scenario. Gender-diverse students are weighing the risks of being their authentic selves, and many are being forced back into the closet for fear of being outed too early. Bill 137 must be repealed, for the sake of every young person in our province.

The launch of this report could not be timelier. It coincides with my appointment as the Shadow Minister for 2SLGBTQ+ Affairs, a first in Saskatchewan's history and a role I take very seriously. And so, I take the recommendations in this document seriously as well. We continue to call for the repeal of Bill 137. Our Saskatchewan NDP caucus will continue to show up for the queer and trans community whenever possible. And I promise to continue to advocate for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

**Nathaniel Teed, MLA Saskatoon Meewasin
Shadow Minister for Labour and 2SLGBTQ Affairs
Deputy Whip of the Official Opposition
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2023, the Government of Saskatchewan passed Bill 137, the *Parents' Bill of Rights*. Framed as enhancing parental rights over children under 16, the bill requires schools to obtain parental consent before students may use preferred names and pronouns. It also enables parents to entirely opt their children out of sexual health education in schools and prohibits third parties, like community-based organizations, from providing education in schools, including sexual health education.

Over 600 letters were submitted to members of the Saskatchewan NDP, the official opposition, in protest of the bill and the government's plan to invoke the Notwithstanding clause. This report, prepared by the Social Innovation Lab on Gender and Sexuality at the University of Saskatchewan in partnership with MLA Nathaniel Teed, analyzes those letters to better understand community concerns and situate them within ongoing debates, similar legislation in Alberta, and former legislation in New Brunswick.

The letters reveal widespread opposition to Bill 137 on several fronts. Community members criticized the bill's impact on inclusive teaching practices and on the mental health and safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, especially trans and gender-

diverse youth. They expressed alarm over the bill's roots in misinformation, the influence of far-right political agendas, the rushed legislative process that bypassed expert and community consultation, and the bill's potential to violate the human rights of those impacted.

Ignoring opposition, the Saskatchewan Government passed Bill 137 by invoking the Notwithstanding clause, a clause that allows federal or provincial governments to put laws in place, even if they do not adhere to human rights protections. Perceived as an abuse of government power and a threat to democracy, use of the Notwithstanding clause prompted many to condemn the bill and to pledge to vote against the Saskatchewan party in future elections.

Many people emphasized the direct harm the bill poses to trans and gender-diverse youth, including increased risks of outing, family rejection, mental health crises, and increased risk of suicide. They called for the bill's repeal and urged the government to consult educators, healthcare professionals, legal experts, and affected communities.

In sharing the themes and positions of these letters, this report amplifies the many voices who spoke out against Bill 137 and consequently, spoke for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and their rights.



KEY THEMES FROM THE LETTERS

1. **There is Widespread Public Opposition to Bill 137:**

Over 600 letters came from across the province and from people from various religious and political backgrounds, including members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and people who are not members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, lawyers, doctors, teachers, healthcare workers, parents, grandparents, youth, and many others. Letters were unique, well-researched, and reflected deep public concern.

2. **Bill 137 is Harmful and Poorly-Designed Educational Policy:**

Writers emphasized that Bill 137 would harm all students by undermining inclusive education and removing critical resources. The policy was developed without consultation with experts or affected communities, and contradicts existing best practices in education and health.

3. **Misuse of the Notwithstanding Clause:**

The government's use of the clause was seen as anti-democratic, silencing legal challenges and bypassing rights protections. Legal and human rights experts, along with teachers, healthcare providers, and others, condemned its use as authoritarian and dangerous.

4. **Political Pandering and Far-Right Influence:**

Writers denounced the bill as a political designed to appease a far-right base, not a response to real public need. Many linked it to broader anti-2SLGBTQIA+ movements and disinformation campaigns as they are operating in other provinces across Canada (New Brunswick and Alberta) and throughout the United States.

5. Direct Harm to 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth:

Letters warned that the bill would increase risks of mental health crises, suicide, family rejection, and violence for trans and gender-diverse youth. Many saw it as a rollback of hard-won rights.

6. Lack of Transparency and Legitimate Support:

The bill was rushed through with little explanation or data. Only 18 letters of support were cited—some from non-parents or out-of-province residents—while experts and advocates were ignored.



7. “Parental Rights” as a False Justification:

Many challenged the government’s framing of the bill, noting that “parental rights” are not protected in the Charter, while children’s rights to safety, identity, and autonomy are. Writers challenged the idea that parents should be allowed to control their children’s gender identities.



8. A Betrayal of Saskatchewan Values:

Letters described the bill as contradictory to the province’s legacy of inclusion, community support, and public health leadership. Many expressed grief, anger, and alienation from a government they no longer recognized as representative of their values.

9. There is a Groundswell of Activism and Engagement:

The bill mobilized people to attend rallies, plan public forums, contact MLAs, and commit to political change. This resistance marked the beginning of a growing movement for justice and accountability.



BACKGROUND TO THE BILL

On August 22, 2023, the Saskatchewan government, led by the Saskatchewan Party and Premier Scott Moe, proposed a policy titled “The Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns by Students” (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2023). Education Minister Dustin Duncan announced that the policy was designed to address concerns about “parental inclusion and consent” as raised by provincial residents (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2023). Key components included a requirement for parental or guardian consent for students to participate in sexual health education, with an option for parents to opt-out their children entirely, while third party organizations, such as non-profits, were now prohibited from providing any education in classrooms (many had previously provided sexual health education, among other things). The proposed policy also indicated that students under 16 must get parental consent before using a name and/or pronouns in school that differ from those on legal documents (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2023).

The policy emerged in a broader context of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ policies targeting youth and adults across North America. Florida’s infamous “Don’t Say Gay” bill was one of the first, passed in 2022, forbidding teachers from talking about sexuality and gender identity in any classroom up to Grade 3. This sparked similar legislation across the United States and later in Canada, including in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and now in Alberta.

Initial Responses to the Proposed Bill and Court Challenge

Following Minister Duncan’s announcement of the proposed pronoun policy, only eighteen official complaints to the government were cited as justification for the policy, and it was determined after the fact that some of these eighteen complaints were from out-of-province residents and others were from non-parents (The Canadian

Press, 2023, para. 1). Some complaints expressed concerns about perceived “anti-heterosexual” discrimination and suggested that schools should celebrate straight people and God alongside Pride events (The Canadian Press, 2023). In the days following the announcement, Education Minister Duncan received 75 letters and emails from Saskatchewan residents, with over two-thirds of these letters firmly opposed to the proposed policy (Kurz, 2024). The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth also released a review of the policy that expressed concern over its discrimination on the basis of gender expression and the need to respect the autonomy of children in matters of gender (Saskatchewan Advocate for Children & Youth, 2023). Similarly, the Saskatchewan School Board Association expressed concern over the lack of consultation in creating the proposed policy and urged the government to pause its implementation until a full review could take place (Patterson, 2023). Public rallies and protests across the province further underscored widespread opposition to the policy (Kurz, 2023).

The policy was challenged in court by the University of Regina’s UR Pride Centre, which argued that the policy “violated the right to security and equality of students” (Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, 2023). The Saskatchewan Court of King’s Bench issued an injunction to “paus[e] the operation of the policy while the case was ongoing because the youth affected by the policy would suffer ‘irreparable harm’” (LEAF, 2023, para. 3). In response to this ruling, the government proposed Bill 137, *the Parents’ Bill of Rights*, invoking the Notwithstanding clause to override the injunction and shield the legislation from further judicial review. They immediately held a special sitting of the legislature to rush the bill through, stripping the public of any opportunity for further input in the process (Hunter, 2023), and dismissing any legal or public correspondence that was voiced in the meantime.

Use of the Notwithstanding Clause

Originally added to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the 1980s, the Notwithstanding clause allows governments to shield legislation from court and human rights challenges. In the case of Bill 137, this means that even if the law infringes on students' rights to security, it cannot be struck down as unconstitutional (LEAF, 2023, para. 5). The clause was originally designed to preserve provincial legislative authority (Ziminojic & Chevalier, 2022). For decades, however, it was considered too controversial to invoke. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein, for example, attempted to use the clause twice, first in the mid-1990s (Leavitt, 2018) and then again in 2000 (Leavitt, 2018) but ultimately backed down both times in response to public and legal opposition.

In recent years, this restraint has eroded. Ontario Premier Doug Ford has invoked the clause to enforce back-to-work legislation, and Quebec Premier François Legault used it to ban public sector workers from wearing religious symbols (Stevenson, 2024). Saskatchewan's Bill 137 joins this trend, drawing criticism from legal experts and the federal government alike (Ziminojic, 2023). More recently, Alberta's United Conservative Party has put forward anti-2SLGBTQIA+ policies of their own, threatening to invoke the Notwithstanding clause to pass legislation if necessary (Amnesty International, 2024). These examples illustrate how the Notwithstanding clause is increasingly being used to bypass legal protections for marginalized communities in society (workers, religious minorities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people).

In the case of Bill 137, its use amounts to a "legal sledgehammer that circumvents the protective role of the judiciary and undermines public education in Saskatchewan" (Loewen Walker & Adesanya, 2024, 4). Normally, courts serve as a safeguard, reviewing whether laws violate Charter or human rights. But by invoking the Notwithstanding Clause at the bill's introduction, the Saskatchewan Party preemptively shut the courts out, removing a crucial check on legislative power and leaving the rights of children and youth without judicial protection (Loewen Walker & Adesanya, 2024, 4).

After the Passing of Bill 137

Since the passing of Bill 137, *the Parents' Bill of Rights*, on October 20, 2023, public debate has continued. Community groups, teachers, parents, and young people continue to speak out, while Saskatchewan's NDP remains committed to repealing Bill 137 if there is a future change in the Saskatchewan government. The Bill goes beyond the terms of the initial "pronoun policy" by requiring explicit parental consent before any student under 16 can be referred to by a name or pronoun different from those on their legal documents. This requirement applies even in instances where school staff believe that seeking parental consent could cause "physical, mental or emotional harm" to the student. In such cases, staff are still prohibited from using the student's affirmed name or pronouns. Instead, the principal of a school is directed to encourage the student to speak to a professional (a counsellor or social worker) to develop a plan to come out to their parents (Egale, 2023). This clause, Section 197.4 of the amendment, was a key concern raised by the Saskatchewan NDP during the legislative debate. However, the Saskatchewan Party refused to make any changes and passed the bill as originally submitted (Salloum, 2023c).

This report documents the outpouring of community response in relation to the proposition of both the pronoun policy and Bill 137. By foregrounding these voices, we hope to show the strength of public support across Saskatchewan for trans and gender-diverse youth. This fight is not only for the lives and well-being of trans and gender-diverse youth, but for access to safe, welcoming, and inclusive educational spaces for all children and youth across the province.

THE LETTERS

In response to the Saskatchewan Party's plan to pass Bill 137 using the Notwithstanding clause, NDP MLA for Saskatoon Meewasin, Nathaniel Teed, put out a statement asking for people to submit letters of concern. Many of the letters were read aloud during the emergency legislative session called to push the bill through (Simes, 2023).

Over 600 letters were submitted to Teed and other Saskatchewan NDP MLAs between August and October 2023. While some were based on publicly available templates, more than 450 were unique submissions. Many were written in response to the original policy proposal, while others specifically addressed the formal legislation and the use of the Notwithstanding clause.

While over 40% of writers chose to remain anonymous, many others shared personal details, including their professions, parental status, place of residence, and whether they were members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Among those who self-identified, the demographics were diverse. Over 80% were from Saskatoon or Regina, but submissions also came from more than 20 other Saskatchewan communities, along with a small number from former residents now living outside the province.

Forty-six people were current or former educators in K-12 or post-secondary institutions; 23 worked or had worked in healthcare or social work; and 10 had experience in the legal field. Sixty-two individuals explicitly identified as 2SLGBTQIA+, and 94 were parents. While many expressed support

for the Saskatchewan NDP, political and religious affiliations varied. A small but notable number described themselves as former Saskatchewan Party supporters, some identified as conservatives, and over a dozen noted they were Christians, including five members of the clergy, all of whom expressed strong opposition to Bill 137.

While letters mentioned Two Spirit youth, there was no discussion of the specific impacts that Bill 137 will have on subsections of the population including Indigenous youth, youth of colour, and other young people who face intersectional barriers such as those in foster care, youth with disabilities, and others. Two Spirit people have shared that Bill 137 completely overrides Indigenous sovereignty, cultural teachings within Indigenous communities, and educational jurisdiction on First Nations land. This is a key focus area for future research, advocacy, and action.

This report examines the concerns raised and emerging themes from community responses. It was prepared by faculty and researchers from the University of Saskatchewan's Social Innovation Lab on Gender & Sexuality. All quotes have been anonymized and are published with the writers' consent.

The letters reflect a wide range of perspectives, but share a common message: the bill, and the process by which it was passed, represent a failure in governance and a threat to the rights and safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. Writers questioned the lack of consultation, the disregard for human rights frameworks, and the erosion of democratic accountability. Their contributions form the foundation of this report.

FINDINGS & THEMES

Bill 137 Represents Poor Educational Policy

One of the most consistent themes across the letters was the belief that Bill 137 constituted poor educational policy. Approximately 240 of the letters explicitly criticized the bill's impacts on teaching, learning environments, and student safety. Writers drew attention not only to the pronoun provisions but also the lesser-publicized changes to sexual health education.

Such concerns about curricular changes recognized the impact on *all* children, including cisgender and heterosexual youth, alongside 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. Many letter writers warned that

reduced or incomplete sexual education increases the risk of unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (also shown in Kim et al., 2023; Lindberg & Maddow-Zimet, 2012). Furthermore, they noted that children and youth are less likely to speak out about experiences of sexual assault or abuse without the benefits of sexual health and consent-based education programs (also shown in Zwi et al., 2007).

More specific to 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, a lack of sex education that includes discussion of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities, bodies, and safe sex further marginalizes these young people, while also removing an avenue for safe and healthy discussion and exploration (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017).



One writer wrote that Bill 137 was:

Insulting to teachers as licensed professionals to suggest they have to get parental approval for any part of the curriculum. Will parents want to opt-out of math or science curriculum at some point? This will set a precedent for that too. Parents haven't lost their rights since gender and sexual health became part of the school curriculum.

They argued that diminished sexual health education negatively impacts children's welfare and that a child's autonomy and right to education should override their parents' desires. One parent wrote that Bill 137 "could negatively impact teachers and school staff [as] they may feel compelled to censor their teaching materials and discussions to avoid potential conflicts with parents. This self-censorship can hinder the open and inclusive learning environment that should be at the core of our education system." This person noted how self-censorship could impact children's education, the wellbeing of instructors, and the quality of education that teachers provide. Another response observed the impossible compromise that Bill 137 would create for teachers and school counsellors as it puts them "at risk of betraying their standards of professional ethics," on account of forcing them to override the privacy of their students.

Other letters outlined the governance pressures that the bill would bring about, noting that while "It is stated in the Pronoun Policy that it is the responsibility of Saskatchewan school divisions to create their own administrative procedures that guide the practical use of said policy. Saskatchewan school staff and administrators are understaffed, underpaid, and overworked." Consequently, enforcement of the policy within schools would place unnecessary strain on an already stressed system, and negatively impact educational outcomes.

One teacher referenced the way the policy impacted their teaching:

My time is rather spent teaching students how to write strong paragraphs and cite sources in MLA format – hardly the controversial material the far right accuses teachers of flooding classrooms with. The one exception is a unit project where students will send out invitations to community leaders to come speak to their class about the work they are doing to make Saskatoon a better place. I had to tell my students that, at this time, OUTSaskatoon would not be welcome. I felt sick.

Prior to the implementation of Bill 137, educational community organizations such as OUTSaskatoon, UR Pride, Saskatoon Sexual Health, and the Saskatoon Sexual Assault and Information Centre regularly provided workshops and trainings to both students and teachers within Saskatchewan's many school divisions. In fact, some of these organizations received funding from the Ministry of Education to do this very work, including to build relevant, age-appropriate curriculum on sexual health, consent, gender, and sexuality. Bill 137 rolled back years of work and relationship-building, not only removing resources for teachers, but also removing pathways to support for students and their parents.

Letters also documented instances of misinformation around educational policy. For example, they indicated that the Saskatchewan Party spread false narratives about 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals within schools, educational policy, and sexual education curriculum. One writer, a lawyer, felt that "The amount of misinformation Scott Moe has spewed about these issues is truly astonishing. It would be expected in undemocratic states or dictatorships but should not be the norm here."



A teacher observed that “In recent months I have seen public attacks on my colleagues that stem from a misinformed & hate filled place.” These letters demonstrated that misinformation is not only a threat to democratic values, but also constitutes an interpersonal danger that threatens people’s safety and security.

Writers identified right-wing organizations such as Sask United and Action4Canada, as influencing the Saskatchewan Party and their supporters. As one person explained:

“Some parents demonstrate a willingness to purposefully misinterpret and misrepresent education as absurd or predatory. The Million March Facebook pages, many of which have been renamed to distance themselves from the initial event, continue to circulate rumours that schools make litter boxes available for students who identify as furies. These same groups insist that schools are part of some kind of globalist conspiracy to groom and abuse children while defending private institutions, such as the private schools in Saskatchewan where children actually were being abused.

This writer identifies how Saskatchewan’s shifts in policy intertwine with a larger anti-2SLGBTQIA+ movement that preys on fears and demonizes queer communities. These rumours cause great harm to all students, but especially 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

Poor educational policy can lead to disastrous results; as one writer wrote, “This is the game the

government is playing, and they have a big card up their sleeve: the Notwithstanding clause. It is the trump card, indeed. We should all be afraid of what comes next” (Saskatoon StarPhoenix, 2023). The author contends that the use of the Notwithstanding clause sets a dangerous precedent for other controversial policy proposals. The use of legal loopholes such as this offers the Saskatchewan Party a great degree of power in pushing through other policies, regardless of public opinion. Many letter writers were fearful that Bill 137’s passing could lead to other policies or legislation that would further impinge on people’s rights and freedoms.

“This will cause harm”: Bill 137’s Impacts on 2SLGBTQ+ Youth

Whether or not it was accompanied by a call to repeal the bill, the most frequent concern raised by respondents was the harm Bill 137 would cause to 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, particularly trans youth. More than 300 letters addressed this directly. Writers emphasized that the bill would further marginalize 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and undo years of progress in recognizing their identities and affirming their rights.

Letter writers felt compelled to speak on behalf of youth who, due to age or circumstance, may not have been able to publicly advocate for themselves. A journalist and parent of two wrote, “I cannot support a policy that forces kids to either out themselves to their parents before they are ready or get back in the closet. I cannot support a policy that experts and the people who it will impact, have made it clear it will harm them.”

Many letters focused on the dangers of forced outings, especially when youth are not ready or safe to share their identities at home. Studies demonstrate the harms caused by such forced “outings” (Goodyear et al., 2024) and the dangers to 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in situations where families do not accept their identity (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017). For one community respondent, Bill 137 is an effort to “force LGBTQ+ children back into [a state] of secrecy. Of fear. Of self-hatred. One where

suicide or self-harm becomes preferable to any kind of honesty or openness. I ask you: how is this keeping ANYONE safe?"

Writers drew on studies and professional knowledge to support their concerns. A board member of a nonprofit serving vulnerable populations explained: "Experts warn that the hastily drafted legislation will put youth in this province at risk of houselessness, self-harm, and suicide. With the safety and well-being of children held in the balance, this is a time for very careful deliberation, and not partisan politics."

One ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community explained that "This policy would push children to remain untrue to themselves until they turn 16. This will affect their mental health especially. From personal experience, the lack of knowledge and ability to explore identity has led to suicidal thoughts and expressions. I fear for the youth who will look to other ways of expression while they are forced to pretend they are someone they are not."

Mental health and safety concerns extended to the broader risks youth could face. One 2SLGBTQIA+ community member referenced Health Canada data: "Transgender youth exposed to hostile school environments often face higher rates of substance abuse and engage in risky behaviors as a coping mechanism. These behaviors can have serious long-term health implications." Another parent of a gender-diverse child argued that "the Saskatchewan government's policy would force transgender and non-binary kids and youth to out themselves to their parents, putting themselves in a vulnerable and potentially dangerous situation."

Many writers were especially alarmed by the increased risk of suicide. One stated, "I have seen personally what happens when kids are outed to unaccepting parents, and in the worst cases it ends in suicide. Children are literally killing themselves because they are told they cannot express their gender identity and that it is 'wrong'. They feel totally alone." "very vulnerable students will be forced into a 'closet' where they cannot be themselves, or cannot be their real selves [...] it can even lead to suicidal thoughts and plans."

Multiple letters cited relevant research that documents how 2SLGBTQIA+ youth are at higher risks for mental health disparities, depression, and suicide (Johns et al., 2019), and that "Trans youths are 5 times more likely than their peers to attempt suicide in Canada" (Canadian Health Survey, 2019). Another writer referenced a Trevor Project survey which found that "45% of LGBT youth have seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. For transgender and non-binary youth almost 1 in 5 have attempted to take their own life."

These statistics were shared widely across letters, signaling a shared concern rooted in both research and lived experience. Writers contrasted this risk with the narrow political motivations behind the bill. One asked pointedly, "You're playing with the literal lives of youth across the province all for what, an extra, let's be honest, 30 votes? Does that seem worth it to you?"

The message from writers was clear: Bill 137 puts 2SLGBTQIA+ youth at greater risk of harm. Writers urged their government to recognize the real-world consequences of this policy—not in abstract terms, but in the lives and well-being of the province's most vulnerable children.

"Not Our Saskatchewan"

Many letters voiced deep emotional and political dismay over the bill, expressing that Bill 137 did not reflect the values they associated with their province. For some, the bill signified a regression in human rights and a betrayal of Saskatchewan's history as a place of inclusion and progress.

One parent wrote, "As parents of an autistic teen who is trans, I can say that we now live in fear of what this party is doing to Saskatchewan. They are taking us back to the dark ages, to a time when bigotry was normalized." Others remembered the anti-2SLGBTQIA+ narratives of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century, lamenting how Bill 137 could return historic hate and prejudice against queer and trans communities to the present. A trans woman explained her feelings in this vein:



“ I am terrified. I am worried that the path our government is on now will not stop with the Notwithstanding clause and taking away children’s rights; it will lead to them targeting the gender affirming healthcare of trans adults like myself and many others in the province. We have seen this play out before in the United States. It can happen here. Saskatchewan is my home. I was born here. I love it, but it does not always love me back.

This sense of loss and alienation was echoed by letter writers who feared for the future of the province: “It pains me to hear that future kids may not have these freedoms. [...] I do hope to someday start a family here in the place I have forever called home, but I fear that if policies such as these go through, I have to seriously consider whether or not I can start one here.”

For many, the legislation carried implications beyond education. It symbolized a broader political shift aligned with transphobic rhetoric and divisive right-wing messaging imported from the United States. These concerns often referenced how the bill could embolden further discriminatory

action and erode the safety and dignity of 2SLGBTQIA+ people across the province, now and into the future.

Saskatchewan’s public school system has been developed and refined over decades of policy assessment, implementation, and reassessment. Respondents noted how Bill 137 contradicts this history, threatening to have a negative impact on the educational and social needs of students province-wide, as well as on teachers, mentors, and the future of Saskatchewan’s educational system. Hundreds of writers expressed deep concern about the threat Bill 137 posed to Saskatchewan’s public education system—a concern that emerged as one of the most powerful and widespread elements of the public response.

Showing up for the Community: Advocacy, Activism, and Voting Choices

Many respondents who wrote in opposition to Bill 137 linked their resistance to ongoing community activism. Several referenced attending rallies, organizing support networks, and working

alongside advocacy groups. A teacher and parent recalled attending the “Show up for Trans Youth” rally on September 2, 2023: “My children and extended family went to support trans and non-binary students. I was proud of the many teachers I saw at the rally, for the strong words from trans and non-binary students, and for the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation and other organizations for their support.”

Personal experiences were a powerful tool for Saskatchewan residents responding to Bill 137. Many writers shared how the bill would impact them directly, whether as parents, educators, allies, or 2SLGBTQIA+ people themselves. Others reflected on past experiences of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ discrimination, expressing fear that the bill would revive and legitimize past harms in today’s schools, rolling back decades of social progress in Saskatchewan.

These stories rarely stood alone; rather, they served as entry points into broader arguments supported by research, law, and expert opinion. One parent shared that their “child worries about the safety of their friends everyday,” highlighting not only the impact on their own child, but the heightened emotional burden youth now carry on behalf of their friends and classmates.

The bill also galvanized people politically. Numerous writers described it as a turning point in their political engagement, voting intentions, and even their employment, as one respondent highlighted the resignation of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commissioner in protest of the implementation of Bill 137 by way of the Notwithstanding clause.

Returning to the impact on voting intentions, respondents spoke to this repeatedly. One writer noted that because of Bill 137, they would not be voting for the Saskatchewan Party in the 2024 election and that they would be working “with trans friends, family members, and allies to ensure this government is not elected again.” Another addressed their letter directly to Premier Moe: “You do not deserve this position, you have disgraced it, and I will vote again and again against you.”

A physician wrote, “I have voted for the Saskatchewan party throughout my life [but with] the direction the government seems to be headed, which is catering to the right-wing redneck minority, using dog-whistle politics, I would be very happy if this government could call an election so I can correct my mistake of voting for the Saskatchewan party which has such out of touch priorities that they are sacrificing the needs and safety of our most vulnerable children and citizens.”

Another individual wrote that they were “a cis-het straight man who has spent the entirety of my 37 years of life living in Saskatchewan,” and had in the past been “proud” to be from the province. After highlighting what he called “the absolute lack of compassion and basic human decency” that the Saskatchewan Party had displayed, he noted that he would now “gladly lend temporary support to anyone that is fighting a government so keen on stripping rights away from youth.”

For many, Bill 137 crossed a red line. The letters reveal a broad-based refusal to accept what writers saw as discriminatory, anti-democratic governance—and a commitment to supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and human rights at the ballot box.

A “Legal Sledgehammer” and a Threat to Democracy: Opposition to the Notwithstanding Clause

Perhaps no single element of Bill 137 generated as much alarm as the Saskatchewan government’s use of the Notwithstanding clause. Writers repeatedly described this move as anti-democratic, authoritarian, and dangerous. Many were familiar with the clause’s function in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and spoke directly to its implications: “if you have to take away a group of people’s rights, and if you have to use something like the Notwithstanding clause to do it — you’re probably on the wrong side of the argument.”

Respondents viewed the use of the Notwithstanding clause as an abuse of power, and in direct contrast with children’s rights and human rights laws:

“The Saskatchewan Party has taken several actions to force through Bill 137, that are extremely concerning. By calling Justice Michael Megaw’s injunction decision “judicial overreach.” By calling an “emergency” session to be able to more swiftly pass this particular piece of legislation and prevent the courts from doing their job. And by using the Notwithstanding clause to violate Charter Freedoms and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code. I am appalled that this is what my government views as a priority, or even an “emergency.”

Many respondents made reference to the various legal and human rights experts who had already spoken out about the abuse of power that the Notwithstanding clause represented. In particular, John Stefaniuk, President of the Canadian Bar Association (CBA), called out the Saskatchewan Party for invoking the Notwithstanding clause for non-emergency purposes (Canadian Bar Association, 2023). Other writers referred to the review of the initial policy published by the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth in September, 2023 (Saskatchewan Advocate for Children & Youth, 2023) or the resignation of Saskatchewan Human Rights Commissioner Heather Kuttai, which was accompanied by public statements in opposition to Bill 137 (MacLean, 2023).



In her statement Kuttai states “My own son is trans. His coming out process was psychologically and physically harmful. This was even though he felt relatively confident that we, his parents, would still love him” (MacLean, 2023). After nine years of serving as a Saskatchewan Human Rights Commissioner, Kuttai resigned over this legislation, stating that “It’s something I cannot be a part of and I will not be associated with a provincial government that takes away the rights of children” (Salloum, 2023b).

Government Accountability, or Lack Thereof

A lack of government accountability was one of the most robust and multifaceted themes in the letters submitted in response to Bill 137. Hundreds of writers expressed the view that the Saskatchewan Party’s push to enact the bill represented a failure to reflect the will of the people and to govern responsibly.

Writers articulated this concern in several ways. First, many emphasized the ethical responsibility of governments to consult citizens and respond through democratic channels. Second, they critiqued the process through which the bill was introduced and passed, identifying it as rushed, unilateral, and lacking transparency. Third, many referenced legal and human rights frameworks to underscore the government’s failure to uphold fundamental protections. Fourth, several pointed to the government’s apparent deference to a narrow subset of the population, specifically far-right, religious conservative groups. Finally, many urged the repeal or withdrawal of the bill, expressing disappointment that Saskatchewan Party MLAs had not voted against it, calling instead for its proper review through constitutional processes.

Serving all Citizens: The Ethical Responsibilities of Governments

Writers detailed the ethical obligations that governments owe their citizens. Many saw the Saskatchewan Party’s actions, especially the lack of consultation, as a clear breach of this duty. One person wrote, “Requiring teachers to out these students is a violation, and places vulnerable youth at risk for harm from closed-minded family and peers.”

A social worker framed this as an appeal: “As a government, it is your responsibility to pass legislation with the best interest of all citizens in mind, and the proposed policy change does not have the best interests of those in marginalized groups in mind.”

A recurring theme was the notion that elected officials must act in ways that support, not harm, their constituents. One individual wrote: “It is the duty of our elected members of the legislative assembly to act in the best interest of the population, and to make decisions that support, rather than harm, constituents and students.”

These responses reveal a broader concern about the erosion of democracy. Writers not only opposed the content of Bill 137, but felt compelled to hold their government accountable for bypassing established democratic norms. They saw themselves as actively defending democracy by calling out government overreach, demanding transparency, and standing up for youth, equity, and constitutional rights.



(Un)Democratic processes

A significant concern expressed by many Saskatchewan residents was the process, or lack thereof, that led to the creation of Bill 137. At the time the letters were written, the Saskatchewan Party had offered little explanation about how or why the policy was developed, and who, if anyone, had been consulted. Many writers questioned the legitimacy of the process, recognizing that a lack of consultation existed beyond the original 18 letters the government had received in the summer of 2023. There was no evidence that the Saskatchewan Government had sought input from experts in childhood development, educational professionals, human rights experts, or individuals with lived experience. One respondent noted that “The policy was enacted without any consultation with mental health clinicians with expertise working with gender and sexually diverse youth.”

For many, the government’s failure to consult undermined its claim that the policy was designed to protect children and support parents. One parent challenged this narrative directly, writing: “Lisa Broda, Saskatchewan’s advocate for children and youth, as well as the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission have publicly stated that they were not consulted regarding this Policy.”

The rapid timeline for moving from a policy to a fully enacted bill heightened concern. Many pointed out that legislation with such serious implications for youth and schools should not be rushed through a special legislative session. This approach was viewed as a deliberate strategy to avoid public scrutiny.

Many writers also questioned the validity of the “data” cited by the government to be behind the government’s claims. One form letter, submitted by seven people stated “While Premier Moe argues that this policy aligns with the majority of Saskatchewan residents and parents, it is crucial to recognize that the rights and well-being of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth should never be sacrificed based on the perceptions of a ‘majority’ . . . that still has yet to be proven with legitimate data.” Writers expressed frustration over the Saskatchewan Government’s reliance on a single-question survey, which many believed was worded misleadingly, as the sole evidence of public “support” for the policy.

These observations reveal deep public concern about the legitimacy and transparency of the policy process. Many viewed Bill 137 as built on a shaky foundation: rushed, opaque, and politically motivated, rather than based on evidence garnered from those most impacted

18
letters
received by the
Saskatchewan
Party

600+
letters
received
through this
call-out

Human Rights

Unsurprisingly, many respondents outlined the ways that Bill 137 infringed on the human rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. One person stated that “Well-protected human rights are a defining feature of Canadian and Saskatchewan society, and the use of the Notwithstanding clause to violate the Charter rights of children is unconscionable.” While another wrote that “both the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code protect children’s rights regardless of gender identity or age. . . . The proposed policy violates both of these legal human rights doctrines and the invocation of the notwithstanding clause tells residents of Saskatchewan that Scott Moe is engaging in governmental overreach and disregarding some of our most trusted protections.” Referencing provincial, federal and international children’s rights, respondents zeroed in on the knowing injustice that the bill enacted upon children and youth in Saskatchewan, especially those who are trans or gender-diverse.

Many saw the bill as a targeted attack on marginalized communities. Writers were outraged that their government would single out one of the most vulnerable populations for legal restriction and surveillance. They also expressed concern that the Saskatchewan Party was advancing a broader political agenda shaped by hostility and misinformation. Several referenced the influence of far-right groups such as Action4Canada, while one writer felt that the way in which Bill 137 would discriminate against 2SLGBTQIA+ youth demonstrated “an alignment with far-right trans-antagonist movements on the rise in the United States and the United Kingdom, which often tacitly or overtly intersect with additional conspiracy theories that threaten the safety of the general public.”

These right-wing critiques of gender diversity mirror a long history of framing societal issues around children as a means to justify restrictive and oppressive laws (Semper Vendrell, 2020). Respondents recognized these tactics, highlighting the ways that the contrived language of “parental rights” was used to justify increased surveillance of gender and sexuality. One individual wrote, “Let’s be honest, this isn’t about ‘parental rights.’ If we’re being frank, we both know that ‘parental rights’ is a digestible soundbite invented in an American think tank, not a philosophical or legal guarantee. This is about trying to win votes back from fringe rightwing parties.”

Others connected this language to more dangerous political trends: “Parental rights” was described by one as a “kind of double talk I am used to reading from the worst totalitarian regimes.” Another writer, a parent, dismissed the urgency of the bill as fabricated, calling it “an imaginary problem.” They added, “I’m enraged to see time and money spent on this while my own disabled child struggles to have his needs met in a school system that is stretched to the limit.”

This same writer, like many others, argued that the Saskatchewan Party failed to represent its constituents in the creation of the bill, addressing a “problem” that was to most Saskatchewan residents a “non-issue”, even while the Saskatchewan school system was facing other more pressing issues including budget cuts causing reduced support staff. Beyond analyses like this, letter writers focused on how the government’s failure to uphold human rights laws in the implementation of Bill 137 felt like political and social regression, as well as failing to address issues that Saskatchewan residents actually cared about.

Throughout the letters, writers linked their human rights concerns to broader values of justice, inclusion, and democracy, calling on their elected representatives to reject discrimination and affirm the dignity of all children and youth.

Keeping Residents in the Dark: Dog Whistles and Pandering

Many respondents believed that Bill 137 was introduced and passed not in response to broad public demand, but to appease a small, vocal minority: right-wing voters who view 2SLGBTQIA+ rights as a threat to traditional or so-called “Christian values”. A teacher and ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community criticized the premier directly for this, writing that “The fact that Scott Moe is willing to put his own political future above kids’ safety and well-being is deplorable.”

Many were frustrated that the government prioritized political expediency over more urgent needs in the province. A doctor wrote, “I’m disillusioned that the government in my home province, where I have chosen to practice family medicine amidst a primary care crisis, has chosen to bypass the constitution — to hurt real, vulnerable yet resilient people, instead pandering to the voices of a tiny minority, without consultation with the trans community or with teachers.”

This pandering, many argued, reinforced regressive and exclusionary views of gender. As one parent observed, “This policy panders to extremists, the ultra-right fanatics, and bigots who wishfully see gender as binary.” Parents and teachers (those who spend the most time with school-aged children) consistently expressed that the bill had little to do with protecting youth and everything to do with securing votes from a conservative and religious base.

Repeal Bill 137

Nearly a hundred letter writers explicitly called for Bill 137 to be repealed or voted down, framing their demands as both moral imperatives and expressions of civic duty. These critiques made it clear that simply opposing the bill was not enough, the policy had to be reversed.

One concerned parent wrote vehemently:

What this government is achieving with this policy is clear. Votes. Latching on to the far-right news item of the day. The Saskatchewan Party has made it very clear that they DO NOT CARE about our children. They want to spread hateful messaging and make parents fearful. ... Our youth are watching closely as you continue to erode their education and attack their autonomy. The youth of today will be of age to VOTE when they turn 18. And know this – they will not be voting for Scott Moe or this current Saskatchewan Party government. Sincerely, [name] A DISGUSTED AND WORRIED PARENT OF FOUR ADULT CHILDREN INCLUDING A YOUNG TRANSGENDER ADULT AND A FORMER SASKATCHEWAN PARTY SUPPORTER.

While others placed direct responsibility on Premier Moe and his government and one person wrote: “Instead of focusing on real emergencies being faced by Saskatchewan people – such as a health care crisis, a cost of living crisis, an intimate partner violence crisis, and so on, Scott Moe is cowardly pandering to his far right base who is threatening to abandon him.” Likewise, a parent of a gender-diverse child wrote: “Premier Moe, if you insist on pushing through this policy, you will be responsible for harming our most vulnerable community members. No one deserves to have their fundamental rights stripped away. I implore you, please reverse your decision on this policy and help create a world where 2SLGBTQ+ youth are celebrated, not scorned.”



Another called on “Premier Moe, Minister Cockrill, the Saskatchewan Party government, and all MLAs to revoke these harmful, regressive policies.” By naming elected officials directly, these writers made clear who they held accountable for the harm they feared the bill would cause.

Across all letters, a consistent message emerged: Bill 137 is not just flawed—it is unjust. Writers called for its full repeal to prevent further harm and to protect the dignity and rights of all youth in Saskatchewan.

“An infringement on the essence of personal identity”: Parental Rights and Children’s Rights

Closely tied to the broader human rights discussion, many respondents challenged the Saskatchewan Party’s framing of Bill 137 as a matter of “parental rights.” Respondents identified a divide between so-called parental rights—which many were quick to point out don’t truly exist—and the established rights of children to autonomy, privacy, and self-determination.

A university professor pointed out the legal and constitutional flaws in Premier Moe’s argument: “Scott Moe has also repeatedly cited ‘parental rights’ as a reason for these policies [but] parental rights are fictitious—they are not enshrined within the charter, but children’s right to safety remains a crucial constitutional element.” This critique was echoed by a legal practitioner who wrote “Scott Moe has said the policy is about parental rights, but a child is not the property of their parents.”

While some writers acknowledged the importance of parental involvement in education, they argued that Bill 137 went too far. As one parent put it, “While I understand the importance of involving parents in their children’s education, I believe this policy goes too far and infringes upon the rights and well-being of students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds.”

The notion that parental rights needed to be maintained over children’s enshrined human rights struck many writers as concerning. As one parent wrote, Bill 137 “isn’t simply a right to know about how a child identifies: the policy is a right to control how that child identifies.” This distinction was central to many writers’ concerns. They noted that supportive parents already provide consent when their children express their identities, meaning that Bill 137 was designed to appease unsupportive parents at the expense of youth’s well-being.

As one person explained, “Canada made a commitment to ensure that all children are treated with dignity, all children have a voice, that they be protected from harm, be provided with basic needs and opportunities to reach their full potential and have the right to participate fully in all aspects of life.” Another emphasized the emotional and psychological harm of overriding the agency of children and youth: “Forcing disclosure of a child’s identity removes their agency to take their journey on their own time.”

For many Saskatchewan residents, the danger of Bill 137 was not just in its content, but in the precedent it set: that children’s rights could be suspended or diminished for political purposes. Writers consistently rejected this premise and called for protections for the rights of children and youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are drawn directly from the letters themselves, to be used by organizations, community members, and policymakers:

1. **Call for Full Repeal of Bill 137:**

This was the most common concrete demand. Advocacy campaigns should continue centring this goal.

2. **Challenge the Use of the Notwithstanding Clause:**

Legal experts, civil society groups, and opposition parties should continue to draw attention to the misuse of the clause as undemocratic and harmful.

3. **“The Personal is Political”:**

Share the Stories and Letters: Public readings, social media campaigns, and press conferences sharing excerpts from letters and lived experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth before and after implementation of the policy could personalize the issue and build public pressure.

4. **Address Gaps in Representation and Amplify Two Spirit and Indigenous Youth:**

Centre the experiences of Indigenous and Two Spirit Youth. Address the ways that Bill 137 intersects with colonialism, racism, ableism, and state control.

5. **Push for Public Consultation:**

Demand meaningful consultation with educators, mental health professionals, legal experts, parents, Indigenous communities, and especially 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. This should take place beyond urban centres, reaching to rural and Northern communities, and to First Nations

6. Fight for 2SLGBTQIA+ Support in Schools:

Advocate for renewed relationships between public schools and organizations like OUTSaskatoon, UR Pride, Saskatoon Sexual Health, Planned Parenthood Regina, and the Saskatoon Sexual Assault Centre in order to restore training and education provided to students of all ages.

7. Educate the Public on Rights and Misinformation:

Public awareness campaigns could address common myths (e.g. about “parental rights”) and clarify what rights children actually have under provincial, Canadian, and international law.

8. Mobilize for upcoming Provincial Elections:

Use this report to show broad-based opposition, even from former Saskatchewan Party supporters; frame the repeal of Bill 137 as a key election issue.

9. Continue Community-Based Resistance:

Encourage letter-writing campaigns, rallies, and advocacy from across sectors (healthcare, education, law, cultural, faith communities).

10. Monitor for Policy Spillover:

Watch for similar legislation emerging in other provinces (e.g., Alberta) and share coordinated responses.

11. Support Mental Health Resources for 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth:

Given the documented risks, there is an urgent need for increased mental health support, especially as youth deal with the impacts of the bill.

FIGHTING BACK

Bill 137 prompted a wide range of responses from people across Saskatchewan. In their letters, they critiqued the bill for its impact on public education, its infringement on children's rights, its reliance on the Notwithstanding clause, and the broader implications for government accountability and democratic process. This report has highlighted recurring themes raised across hundreds of submissions, drawing on direct quotes to illustrate the depth of concern, insight, and engagement shown by the public.

What may have appeared to some as a simple policy about “parental rights” was quickly revealed to be a harbinger of division with profound consequences. Writers clearly articulated how the bill would cause harm to 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, erode the autonomy of children, and replicate patterns of political maneuvering seen in other jurisdictions. Many saw Bill 137 as part of a troubling trend of using trans and gender-diverse people as political scapegoats.

Writers viewed the use of the Notwithstanding clause as particularly egregious: a means to silence dissent, bypass legal scrutiny, and rush through legislation without proper public consultation. For many, the policy represented a step backwards, not just for gender and sexuality rights, but for democracy, education, and human rights more broadly. Several writers described it as a return to the kind of exclusionary and discriminatory environment they had believed Saskatchewan had left in the past.

The overwhelming response from writers across the province reminds us that progress is never guaranteed. As many letter writers pointed out, the rights of marginalized groups remain vulnerable to political retrenchment. This reinforces the urgent need to speak out, to organize, and to engage in democratic processes that hold governments accountable.

The act of writing letters, and of documenting those letters here, serves as a form of collective resistance. It ensures that Bill 137 does not go unchallenged, and that the voices of those most impacted are heard. In amplifying these voices, this report contributes to a growing movement demanding dignity, safety, and justice for all youth in Saskatchewan.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The response to Bill 137 revealed a strong network of care, solidarity, and advocacy among Saskatchewan residents. While the government turned its power against one of the most marginalized groups in our province, thousands of people raised their voices in defence of trans and gender diverse youth, inclusive education, and basic human rights. This is the story that must guide us forward.

Saskatchewan, whether in cities, towns, or First Nations communities, is a place where every child should be met with safety, affirmation, and dignity. Where public schools are places of belonging, not fear. Where policy is shaped by dialogue, evidence, and empathy, not misinformation and political games.

The movement sparked by this bill is at a tipping point. The letters in this report are not just reactions to a single piece of legislation; they are our collective resistance. They point toward a future where the rights of children and youth are upheld without compromise, and where Two Spirit, trans, and gender diverse youth are free to be who they are, without fear and without exception.



APPENDIX

The pronoun policy was originally published to the Government of Saskatchewan website on August 22nd, 2023. The complete version has since been removed from all public websites, but a news announcement: “Education Minister Announces New Parental Inclusion and Consent Policies” remains posted to the website outlining the main components of the policy: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2023/august/22/education-minister-announces-new-parental-inclusion-and-consent-policies>

Bill 137: The Parents’ Bill of Rights

The full piece of legislation can be found here: <https://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Bills/29L3S/Bill29-137.pdf>

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