

Hello members of the Regional School Committee and the greater Amherst community. I am Halley Kelly, and I serve on the governing body of the Massachusetts Democratic Party as the minority representative for gender non-conforming people. I'm here today, not just because I am a passionate member of the UMass Amherst Community, but also because many of the abused and targeted students in ARMS are my constituents.

As an elected official, it is my duty and moral responsibility to speak up and act when injustice happens around me. As electeds, when we decide to run for office, we are making a sacred promise to our communities to never be a bystander to the evils of this world. We take on a special responsibility to live the best values of our people and to be a role model for our youth who want to become public servants.

When one gets elected to the school committee, that responsibility is even higher. With how the school committee has handled the violent bigotry in ARMS, we as the Amherst, Pelham, Shutesbury community have to ask if this is the example we want to be setting for our kids. Is being a bystander to someone being complicit in abuse the way we want our kids to act when they become adults?

Superintendent Morris knew of the transphobic abuse happening at ARMS. Nationally, not having an accepting school increases the trans youth suicide rate by 50%, and we know from hearing their stories that this situation is no different. To those who are still intent to defend Morris, even after so many of his wrongdoings have been revealed, I ask you to spend some time doing serious self-reflection.

Uncomfortable conversations about youth suicide and child abuse are uncomfortable. It's right there in the name, so I don't blame anyone who feels uncomfortable with the conversations we needed to have about ARMS. Just please ask yourself "Is the discomfort I feel more important than middle schoolers having suicidal ideation?"

If you feel discomfort but realize that addressing and preventing the trauma that trans middle schoolers went through under Morris's watch is what we need to focus on as mature adults, then I want to work with you in facilitating community healing. If you think your personal discomfort is more important than kids wanting to kill themselves, then I don't know how to talk with you.

I hope that the next meeting of the school committee will be in person so that we can have the opportunity to gather together and heal as a community.