

Testimony of Sandra Meade  
Chair, Equality Kansas  
In Support of HB2323  
January 14, 2016

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Sandra Meade, and I currently live in Olathe, Kansas. I have been a resident of Johnson County, Kansas, for the past 16 years. I am here as the chair of Equality Kansas, whose mission it is to ensure the dignity, safety, and legal equality of all lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Kansans. Today my testimony is in support of HB 2323, a bill amending the Kansas Act Against Discrimination, relating to sexual orientation and gender identity.

First, I will briefly tell you a little bit about me, before getting into the details of why I strongly urge you to support HB 2323. I am a proud veteran of the US Navy, having honorably served six years on active duty. Following my Navy service, I worked as a civilian contractor, mostly on highly classified Department of Defense programs for the next 14 years. This included working as a technician on the space shuttle program where I repaired launch processing computer modules, then as a technician installing and maintaining telemetry flight test systems for the B2 bomber when it was still a black program (hidden from public knowledge), and later as a field engineer working on flight simulators that we installed to train the initial cadre of Air Force pilots and aircraft maintainers when the B2 bomber became operational at Whiteman AFB, Missouri. I'm also a proud college graduate, managing to somehow graduate summa cum laude with a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics and Computer Science while simultaneously working full time and raising a family. But the thing I'm most proud of is that I'm the parent of a wonderful son who has graduated college and also currently works in Kansas. These are but a few of the life experiences that have shaped me into who I am today.

However, the thing about me that seems to matter the most to too many people, is that I am also transgender. After being raised as a male and a lifetime of shame and guilt over my internalized brain / body gender identity conflict, I began my transition toward living as female under the guidance of medical professionals over five years ago. Such decisions are not taken lightly, by either the transgender individual, or the medical professionals. The treatment guidelines for transgender individuals follow the standards of care published by the World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH), based on the best available science and expert professional consensus. Today I am the proud confident transgender woman that sits before you today. While my organization represents the entire LGBT community, much of my testimony today will focus on issues faced by the transgender community, specifically.

Once they come out, many transgender people are faced with a loss of respect and privilege, regardless of their personal history prior to the moment they came out. It's as if prior life experiences and accomplishments were of no value, and their dreams and hopes of no interest. Loss of employment or homelessness are the fates that await too many, whether they be professionals or service industry workers. They lose jobs or are denied jobs that they were/are otherwise qualified for, and are too often

abandoned by their faith community and family, their dignity and humanity seemingly stripped away in a moment because of a simple label – transgender.

Based on a ground breaking report released in 2012, the National Transgender Discrimination Study, Injustice at Every Turn, the following statistics shed a light on the severity of the discrimination faced by transgender people:

- Double the rate of unemployment compared to the general population
- Four times more likely to have a household income of less than \$10,000 compared to the general population
- 47% of respondents had experienced an adverse job outcome, such as being fired, not hired, or denied a promotion because they were transgender or gender nonconforming.
- 26% reported being fired
- 16% were compelled to work in the underground economy
- Four times the rate of homelessness compared to the general population after experiencing a loss of employment.
- 19% refused a home or apartment for being transgender
- 11% report being evicted for being transgender
- Less than half the rate of home ownership compared to the general population
- The intersection of racial discrimination and anti-transgender bias is especially devastating, sometimes resulting in double or triple the rates of negative outcomes.

A staggering 41% attempted suicide due to anti-transgender bias they were experiencing and the seemingly insurmountable obstacles they faced, including job loss, low income, harassment, physical or sexual assault.

2015 was a record year for transgender homicides in the United States, with 21 reported victims. One of them was Tamara Dominguez, killed close to here in Kansas City, MO on August 15<sup>th</sup>. She was run over five times. The level of hatred is palpable in the way that many transgender people are killed. The brunt of this violence is felt by transgender women of color, who are disproportionately affected by unemployment and homelessness. They are our most vulnerable, and are being slaughtered for the simple fact that they are transgender.

The environment today, which provides false motive for discrimination and escalating violence, is created by organizations that hope to roll back progress in LGBT rights and keep science from expanding our knowledge of the full human experience. They shamelessly pedal harmful tropes which demonize and dehumanize the transgender community, preying on our most base instinct: fear. It's time we take a direct approach to confronting the misinformation, and it's time for legislators to demand better. People's lives depend on wise leadership and compassionate understanding at a time when the worst

demagoguery is being used to build unsubstantiated fear of human beings who are simply trying to live their lives with a modicum of dignity.

Let me state unequivocally and forcefully that HB2323 does not place anyone at risk of assault or predatory behavior. This trope is the primary vehicle used by opponents to try and derail bills like HB2323, with false claims that non-discrimination protections will allow predators to access the bathroom to harm women and girls. I'm directly confronting this trope here and now – there are already federal and state laws in effect that make such conduct illegal, and this bill does not change that. This bill does not allow predator access to bathrooms. What it does do is allow all men and women to safely use the correct restroom for their gender, including transgender men and women, period.

I'm asking you today to consider evidence provided by communities who have already implemented such protections, such as Iowa and Colorado:

According to Ralph Rosenburg of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, there were no cases of predators trying to access women's restrooms or locker rooms after passage of Iowa's protections for sexual orientation and gender identity.

According to Rico Munn of the Colorado Division of Civil Rights, there were no cases of predators trying to access women's restrooms or locker rooms after Colorado's passage of their similar protections.

I'm asking you to also consider the position statement of the American Psychiatric Association, which in 2013 removed Gender Identity Disorder from the list of mental disorders listed in the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5:

Therefore, the American Psychiatric Association:

1. Supports laws that protect the civil rights of transgender and gender variant individuals.
2. Urges repeal of laws and policies that discriminate against transgender and gender variant individuals.
3. Opposes all public and private discrimination against transgender and gender variant individuals in such areas as health care, employment, housing, public accommodation, education, and licensing.

Please also review the position statement of the American Psychological Association:

Therefore be it resolved that APA opposes all public and private discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived gender identity and expression and urges the repeal of discriminatory laws and policies.

Therefore be it further resolved that APA supports the passage of laws and policies protecting the rights, legal benefits, and privileges of people of all gender identities and expressions.

We are in an important period in history where awareness of the transgender community is growing by leaps and bounds. While many of you may not have known of public figures like Laverne Cox or Janet Mock, both well-known transgender women of color, I'm willing to bet that you have heard of Caitlyn Jenner, formerly the Olympic champion Bruce Jenner, who transitioned to living full time as a female in 2015. We also have a growing number of families who are embracing their young transgender boys or girls instead of shaming and rejecting them. These families benefit from the medical research over the past 25 years which has led to a safe treatment regime and a growing number of practitioners who are knowledgeable and able to help the patient and family through the transition process.

America's top businesses are leading the way in valuing diversity, showing local and state governments that inclusion and diversity is sound business policy. This year, the Human Rights Campaign reported that three fourths of Fortune 500 companies offer explicit gender identity protections in their employment non-discrimination policy. Therefore it would be sound public policy for Kansas to similarly update the Kansas Act Against Discrimination to add sexual orientation and gender identity, ensuring that the state provides a welcoming business environment free from discrimination for Americans largest employers.

In closing, I strongly hope today's hearing isn't the end of the conversation. I am certain that there are groups working simultaneously here in Topeka to introduce additional religious freedom protections. We enthusiastically welcome a conversation on strengthening religious protections as part of the dialog on how we can protect the LGBT community from harmful discrimination. These conversations do not have to be mutually exclusive. Equality Kansas stands willing and ready to come together with interested parties on both sides of these issues in order to find common ground. I believe there is a path forward that brings the two sides together to find middle ground, but it takes leadership and a willingness to see all people for who they are once the labels are stripped away: human beings worthy of respect and the right to live their lives in dignity. Reject fear based messaging on its face, unworthy of reasonable consideration, and bring sensible people from both sides together to end this unnecessary confrontation in Kansas. Please continue this dialog, and find a way to pass HB2323 while assuring the religious community that their right to religious expression will remain intact. Thank you for your time today, and I stand ready for questions or follow up as members of the committee wish.