

Testimony by Rev. Caela Simmons Wood in Opposition to HB2238
Senate Education Committee, Sen. Molly Baumgardner, Chair

March 6, 2023

Mme. Chair, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today. My name is Rev. Caela Simmons Wood; I am an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ and currently serve as the President of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ. I am also active with Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multifaith issue advocacy organization.

As a Christian, a community leader, and the mother of two children in Kansas schools, I urge you to oppose HB2238.

Right now, my middle schooler is gearing up for an exciting season of mountain biking with our local National Interscholastic Cycling Association team. Athletics are such an important part of growing up for Kansas kids. Participation in sports is about much more than the physical skills our kids hone when they play. Being an athlete helps kids learn about values that we hope every child can learn somewhere: loyalty, hard work, picking yourself up and trying again when things don't go well, and what it feels like to be a part of a team.

Every child deserves the opportunity to participate in sports and learn these values.

My faith compels me to work to create a world where all of God's beloved children are treated with dignity and respect. As a Christian, I learned at church and from my sacred texts that God values diversity. The God in my Bible has many expansive names and is not narrowly constrained by categories like "male" or "female." Believing that we are all created in God's image, I – and many other Christians – also believe transgender people are created in God's divine image and have sacred and inherent worth and dignity.

Bills like HB2238 threaten our transgender youth and their families. This bill would not only create unnecessary barriers for transgender youth who have every right to participate in sports, but it does something much more dangerous. When bills like this are considered, transgender youth – a group already highly at-risk for suicide – are more likely to die from suicide. That's the scary truth.

There is no epidemic of transgender girls causing chaos in athletics. Transgender girls are girls. Full stop. And deserve the opportunity to compete just like every other kid. Girls' and women's sports are already protected by federal legislation. And if you want to do more to support female student athletes, please address the real problems that still exist, like underfunding.

I know the kids who will be affected by this bill. And they are brave, fierce, beautiful people who know more about tenacity, courage, loyalty, and strength that I'll ever know. They need our support, not our attacks.

Thank you for your time.

Rev. Caela Simmons Wood,
First Congregationalist United Church of Christ and Kansas Interfaith Action
Manhattan, KS