

Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Doctor Ericka Jobe, and I live in Wichita, Kansas. I am a clinical therapist, a social worker, and a concerned constituent. This testimony is regarding HB 2071. I believe this bill is harmful to Kansans because it restricts the ability of families and their healthcare providers to make individual decisions in the best interest of their children. This bill is an extreme example of government overreach. This particular bill is also full of Fascist ideology. Each time these bills are introduced, they violate more and more of the constitutional rights of Kansans. The advancement of these anti-transgender bills and laws not only undermine the dignity and rights of transgender individuals, but they also perpetuate discrimination, intolerance, and harm against a vulnerable group of our fellow citizens.

Due to my career and educational history, I am able to speak as an expert in this area. I feel this is important to state my expertise for the record, as I feel much of the testimony that is being presented about HB 2071, and other anti-transgender bills in the past, has largely been emotionally based and not grounded in factual evidence.

While this body was attempting to pass HB 2071, last year, I contacted my senator, Chase Blasi, and my congressional representative, Brenda Landwher. While I received a response from Senator Blasi, I never received a response from representative Landwher despite several phone calls, letters, and emails to her office. I do not feel that contacting my representatives, or in Representative Landwher's case attempting to contact, has resulted in any positive outcomes. This is why I am now submitting testimony regarding this new bill.

Repeatedly, bills have been introduced into both the Kansas State Senate and House, under the guise of protecting children and families, yet it has done great harm to many people, some of whom are my clients and family. Despite repeated attempts to pass similar bills to this one, and them not passing, this legislature continues to reintroduce these bills every year. In doing this, your constituents are being shown time and time again that you are not listening to transgender people when they are advocating for their own rights. You have dismissed the input and testimony of healthcare providers, who are trained and experienced in working with the transgender community. You have dismissed the emails, phone calls, letters, and testimony from their loved ones, when they have pleaded with you to make decisions based on facts, and not your political affiliations. You have repeatedly disregarded their opinions and silenced their voices. Despite every medical and mental health association in this country releasing statements that best practice for treating gender dysphoria is affirming care, this body continues to disregard these facts. They have also released statements that bills like this one are going to cost lives. By disregarding these things, you have essentially disregarded the recommendations of these trained professionals and have sided with the fear mongering and ignorance that has been so prevalent in our society as of late. I understand that it is the responsibility of an elected official to fight for the rights of their constituents but am confused as to why it seems the only rights being fought for are the ones for the far right leaning. I feel I must openly express my disappointment with those in our Legislature, who are support the demoralization and discrimination of other human beings.

I would also like to express my disappointment that taxpayer money is continually being wasted on funding attempts to pass these discriminatory bills. Even if this bill wasn't discriminatory at its core, it would force healthcare providers to choose between upholding their ethical duties, as healthcare professionals, and breaking the law. Healthcare providers are another group of people who will also lose

many of their rights if this bills passes. As you can see, many different groups of people will lose their rights.

Being a healthcare provider, and especially a social worker, I am mortified at the language that was used in this bill. The language is vague, sloppy, and doesn't define a healthcare worker well. If therapists aren't allowed to perform gender affirming care, it is going to force a lot of these youth into a mental health crisis. In Texas, for example, a similar law has been enacted. That state has seen violence against transgender youth and adults increase, suicides and suicide attempts have increased, and there has been a mass exodus of healthcare providers, including therapists, from that state. Legislators are not healthcare providers. It is not within their legislative duties or purview to make healthcare decisions for their constituents. Healthcare decisions are meant to be made by the person(s) they affect and the professionals who are treating them.

By taking away affirming care for minors, you're taking the rights away of these children and their parents. If this bill passes, you will be making a statement that parental rights only apply if your child is not transgender. I am not sure who amongst you have children, but please for just a moment, imagine the government stripping you of your right to make medical decisions for your child? If there is even a moment's hesitation before you decide, please reconsider what you are doing here. I implore you to stop insisting, as a legislative body, that you care for the rights of children and families, if you only care for the rights of the one who live the way you want them to.

I have expressed my disgust with the way this body is trying to deprive individuals of their constitutional rights, but my biggest concerns today are the health and welfare of transgender children. The decisions, being made right now, are life and death decisions for some of these children. I hope the weight of that is not lost on you. I know the committee that introduced this bill has seen the information regarding the staggering suicide rates among children who are forced to live as the biological sex they were assigned at birth, instead of their identified gender. If you proceed with these anti-transgender bills, and succeed in stripping these individuals of their rights, people will die. Their blood will be on your hands.

I would like to give you an example of a trans child I know, who is going to be directly impacted by the decisions most of the Republicans in this state legislature will make. This child was assigned male at birth. As early as two and three years old, the child started verbalizing that she was a girl. She wanted to dress like a girl, be treated like a girl, live like a girl, and have a girl's name, etc. She is a girl. Her parents, being educated on gender dysphoria, started to affirm her identity and identity expression. This girl started school as a girl. Her name was legally changed to a girl's name. Her teachers, peers, and everyone she encounters at school, and in the community know her as a girl. She is now a teenager. She has been taking puberty blockers for years. Her parents, medical doctor, endocrinologist, and therapist all agreed with the child's choice to take puberty blockers. It is very clear that this is what was, and is, in her best interest. If this bill becomes law, she will be banned from taking puberty blockers. She will be forced to detransition. She will be forced to use the boy's bathroom at school. She will be forced to develop a boy's body. She will be exposed as a biological male, in front of her peers and everyone else at school. Can you please explain to me how this is in the best interest of this child? Because in my opinion, when this child develops extreme mental health issues, attempts or succeeds in taking her own life, and/or is relentlessly bullied by her peers, it is going to be because of the decisions all of you have been making. I'd like to know, in The Constitution of the United States, what gives you the right to determine her fate for her?

Making one's own health care decisions is an empowering act of self-determination. When a transgender person decides to transition, they are taking control of their own body and identity, which can significantly enhance a person's sense of agency and autonomy. Living as their identified gender can, and in most cases does, improve an individual's self-esteem and body image. Many times, this is reflected in an improvement in social interactions and personal relationships. While societal acceptance of transgender individuals is improving, discrimination and stigma remain issues. This is evident by this bill that has been introduced. Presenting and acting, in a way that aligns with their gender identity, has the potential to reduce the frequency and intensity of discriminatory experiences. This can lead to safer and more positive interactions in various aspects of life, including work, school, healthcare, and social situations. Being able to address the profound incongruence between one's physical body and gender identity offers important gains for a person that span mental health, social integration, self-esteem, and overall quality of life.

The essence of our democracy and the core of your legislative duty is to protect and uplift all constituents, ensuring equal rights, safety, and the pursuit of happiness are accessible to everyone in Kansas, irrespective of gender identity, gender expression, or political affiliation. By endorsing and passing policies like this one, you further marginalize transgender people. That is not in the true spirit of this country or our constitution. Passing laws like these contribute to a climate of hostility and exclusion, amplifying the risks of mental health crises, violence, and discrimination that transgender individuals already face daily.

I urge you to consider the profound implications of such legislation on the lives of transgender youth and adults in our community. These are not abstract political issues. These are human beings! This is not an opportunity to pander to a far-right base, but rather these are real-life challenges that deeply affect the well-being and survival of people we know and care about. Access to healthcare, education, and public services, free from discrimination and prejudice, is a right that should be safeguarded for everyone, including transgender people.

As your constituent and a healthcare provider, I implore you to take a stand against hate and discrimination in all forms. I ask you to vocally oppose this bill and any other legislation that infringes upon the rights and dignity of transgender individuals. Our state should be a beacon of inclusivity and justice, leading with empathy and respect for every person's intrinsic value. Our state should not be a hub of hatred, bigotry, and discrimination.

Let us not be on the wrong side of history by endorsing policies that strip our fellow human beings of their rights and humanity. I hope you will listen to the voices of ALL of your constituents, including the transgender community and their allies, and advocate for laws and policies that protect, rather than harm, the most vulnerable among us. Thank you for your attention regarding this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Ericka Jobe, PhD, LCSW, LCSW, C-PD