

Testimony of Chantalle Hanschu, Kansas State University Student, in Opposition to House Bill 2253

Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, March 22, 2013

Thank you to the Chair and the members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare committee for the opportunity to submit testimony before you all. I am honored and excited to be part of the democratic process. My name is Chantalle Hanschu, and as a lifelong resident of Kansas, I currently attend Kansas State University.

I am writing in opposition to the recently introduced HB 2253, which from my experience would have devastating effects for women and families, especially those dealing with domestic violence. For the past three years, I have worked at a local domestic violence and sexual assault crisis center. I work directly with women and children who have sought shelter in hope of escaping abuse. Over the years, I have developed an understanding of domestic violence as a structural problem that emerges in several different forms. Abuse can be verbal, psychological/emotional (i.e. threats, isolation), physical, spiritual, sexual, and economic. Many survivors of domestic violence face many of these types of abuse simultaneously, making the healing process just that – a process. One of the first steps toward healing is regaining confidence and one’s sense of self. Feeling like, “Yes, this is who I am, and this is what I want to do,” makes all the difference in the lives of people who have experienced abuse.

Unfortunately, many women also experience abuse even more during and/or immediately following a pregnancy. In sexually abusive relationships, pregnancy may be a result of rape, or because the abuser has sabotaged his partner’s birth control. Pregnancy can be used to make the woman feel dependent on the abuser, which decreases the likelihood that a woman could leave the relationship; she may need her partner’s paycheck to care for her child. Here, sexual abuse and economic abuse are linked. This creates a devastating cycle of abuse. However, survivors of domestic violence find ways to resist this overarching control. Women who experience an unwanted pregnancy need to have the option to not have the additional responsibility of a child – a responsibility that when coupled with abuse, often becomes a burden. It is important for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault to have the final say in when or whether they have children. HB 2253 denies women the right to make these important and difficult decisions, even in times of crises. Furthermore, we ought to consider the implications that a child would have if he or she were to be born into an environment prone to abuse. The child becomes an additional and unnecessary victim of domestic violence from the day that child is born. Many women with whom I have spoken have voiced this very real fear. Giving the women the option to control their pregnancies recognizes these concerns and responds to them.

I have had many meaningful conversations with women experiencing abuse in many different ways, and I know that the first step toward healing is regaining control. Women facing abusive relationships need to have access to abortion. Any restrictions to accessing abortion – such as taxes or having to spend time sifting through false information

(i.e. abortions cause breast cancer) – is an extra burden on women dealing with violence. Not only do they have to constantly fight for survival, but if they need an abortion, then they are faced with the undue task of gathering extra funds for unnecessary, arbitrary taxes.

Thank you for considering the futures of people who have experienced abusive relationships. Please vote against HB 2253 to support women struggling with difficult situations.

Sincerely,

Chantalle Hanschu