



**Testimony of Jennifer Parson
President, Douglas County National Organization for Women
on behalf of Kansas National Organization for Women**

In opposition to SB 175

Kansas House Committee on Federal and State Affairs

March 30, 2015

Good morning, Chairman Brunk and members of the Committee on Federal and State Affairs. Thank you for the chance to present testimony regarding SB 175. My name is Jennifer Parson, and I am President of the Douglas County chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). I am here today representing Kansas NOW, an organization that is committed to working for equality for all people in Kansas.

Kansas NOW opposes SB 175 because it will require post-secondary institutions to provide public funding to student organizations which discriminate against women.

On a personal note, please understand that I am not here to vilify religious student groups or individuals. As a lifelong person of faith, former pastor for children and youth, and current Contract Chaplain at Lawrence Memorial Hospital I have a deep appreciation for the value religion can have for young adults. Campus groups can be important sources of social interaction and can help students develop leadership skills.

Gender-based discrimination is real in religious student organizations.

During my first year as a student at the University of Kansas I, for a short time, participated in Campus Crusade for Christ along with several of the students from my residence hall. In general, I found kind, well-intentioned people who worked to develop community among students. On Valentine's Day the leaders separated the men from the women. Leaders talked to the men about being the head and master of their relationships; they talked to the women about being subservient and obedient to the men in their lives. In my experience and according to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence that idea has been used to pressure women into staying in relationships with male abusers.¹ When I spoke up, leadership made it clear that it was not my place to question their teaching and I was no longer welcome at Campus Crusade for Christ.

Faith communities are deeply divided about the role of women in religious leadership.

According to a 2010 survey by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, only 12% of congregations in the United States had a female as their sole or senior ordained leader. This number

¹ http://www.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/NRC_Religion.pdf



jumps to 24% for Oldline Protestant congregations and drops to 9% in Evangelical congregations.² Some denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, prohibit ordination of women. Even within self-identified progressive denominations such as the United Church of Christ, there is wide variation between congregations in their willingness to call women to leadership positions.

Institutional change is often slow, sometimes lagging years or decades behind cultural and individual change. Just this week the Southern Baptist Convention met in Nashville to discuss the denomination's troubling past in relation to race and its support of slavery. Russell Moore, president of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, "acknowledged that the denomination's heritage included preaching family values while splitting up the families of black slaves."³ While I applaud the Southern Baptist Convention's work, this is but one example of the ways religious institutions have been slow to recognize and rectify discrimination.

Schools should not be compelled to provide public funding to discriminatory organizations. Public universities should be places where all people have equal opportunity to participate in campus life and pursue leadership opportunities regardless of classifications like gender, race, and sexual orientation. When public money is used to fund organizations that discriminate, it undermines equality for people throughout the educational community.

As a Chaplain and person of faith, I deeply appreciate the value of religious institutions in the lives of many students while also acknowledging our growing edges. Faith communities must be allowed to grow and change over time at their own pace.

At the same time, public universities should not—*must* not—provide funding or other resources which violate their own non-discrimination policies. Public resources must be used for the promotion of equality for every person.

On behalf of Kansas NOW, I urge you to oppose SB 175.

² http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/quick_question3.html

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/27/southern-baptist-racism_n_6955992.html