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STEPHANIE BYERS
86TH DISTRICT

Education Committee

Thank you, Madame Chair and committee for the opportunity to speak,

There was a time when our government actively tried to erase our people. My Native American ancestors survived bounties placed upon them and other atrocities. Our ways of marriage were forbidden. Our traditional clothing forbidden. Our cultural and medicinal practices forbidden. Our religion and our languages were all considered illegal acts. It was an attempt to systematically erase us as Native Americans, all because we were different than what was then mainstream America.

Here we are... a century later. Since 2016 there have been four bills introduced that would put bounties on the heads of trans school children. Other bills that would have mocked our marriages. During this current legislative term, bills have been introduced that would make it a felony to provide life-saving medication and this bill which would ban trans girls from affirming their identity through sports, erasing them.

Trans kids thrive when their identity is affirmed, but it is not always an easy path. The emotional exhaustion of keeping who you are hidden in a world that often goes out of its way to demonstrate you are not welcome, takes its toll. Affirmation counters those exterior forces, it helps relieve the anxiety and depression that, far too often, leads to suicide.

During my teaching career, I was privileged to work with many trans kids. Matter of fact in addition to going to Oklahoma Christian College together in the 80's, the sponsor of this bill and I taught together at Wichita High School North. When my trans students heard their name called during attendance, their pronouns used, they would beam. It is a tremendous feeling to no longer be invisible, and to be seen for who you truly are. Preventing students from playing sports as their authentic self, removes that affirmation and gives one more proof that, in spite of who you know yourself to be, you are unwanted.

On November 20th of each year, the trans community pauses for the Transgender Day of Remembrance. In these ceremonies there is a reading of the names of transgender people who have died from violence during the year. There are USD 259 students who have died from suicide on this list. I oppose this bill. We don't need to read the names of any more dead children.