

Testimony in Opposition of SB208
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As a recent Derby, Kansas high school graduate, current college student, and member of the LGBTQIA+ community, I am greatly disheartened by the SB208 propositions brought forth by our legislators. I have seen first-hand, and even experienced, the adverse effects of the anti-LGBT legislation placed in Kansas, both inside and outside of school. Just this last September, a dear friend of mine, a transgender male, passed away from an overdose. Going through high school with him, watching him struggle with teachers who refused to use his preferred pronouns, who called him by his deadname (the name that he was born with, but no longer identified with) in front of classrooms full of intolerant peers multiple times, was gut-wrenching and heartbreaking. A handful of other students, and myself, brought it to more than one teacher's attention multiple times. Nothing was done to correct this deliberate hate. While in a theatre class preparing for the upcoming musical, a student who had not previously known he was transgender followed him into the men's bathroom and threatened to physically harm and even kill him after the teacher introduced him by his deadname and birth pronouns. That student received no punishment from administrators when it was brought to their attention. That same student was then allowed to participate in the musical after threatening someone's life based on his gender identity. In Derby, from my experience, only a handful of teachers are willing to step up and protect students who are members of the LGBT+ community. But even with the support of those teachers, higher school officials did nothing.

The introduction of this legislation into a state that already harbors negative perceptions of transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, or any other non-cisgender identifying students could create an even more hostile environment that has serious potential to harm the mental well-being and safety of said students. As legislators, it is your duty to protect your constituents and community members with the laws and bills you pass. Introducing this bill would be detrimental to the entire LGBT+ community of Kansas.

Before coming out as part of the LGBT+ community, as a student-athlete in both middle school and high school, I would have had no issues with a transgender, non-binary, or non-cisgender student being on the same team. I would have warmly welcomed the opportunity for diversity and acceptance. Growing up in an environment that is so outspokenly against anyone in the queer community was extremely damaging to my self-identity, and it took graduating and moving on from such a negative space to be comfortable and accepting of myself. Throughout high school, I was part of one main friend group of queer students who found solace in each other and relied on the safety of the group. Outside of this small family we created, there was nobody else we trusted enough to be ourselves. Watching friends of that group graduate and get away from Derby, and Kansas as a whole, each one was able to blossom by: changing their style, wearing whatever clothes they wanted, dyeing their hair crazy colors, trying pronouns different from their birth-assigned pronouns. They were finally able to grow into their true selves- who they had been the entire time.

It finally clicked. We all began thriving when we graduated because we were no longer terrified of our peers' backlash. We were no longer scared to be called slurs when walking in the hallways. No longer scared of deadnames being called out when attendance is taken. No longer scared of the wrong pronouns being said in front of an entire class. No longer scared of our lives being threatened on school grounds, and having no one to turn to for protection.

No student - no human being - no child - should have to go through that kind of torment because of their gender identity, when it does not affect anyone else.

By introducing this bill, by restricting transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, and even questioning students from expressing themselves in school settings, each of those things will continue, and a new generation of students will grow up feeling the same way my friends and I did. Gender expression and identity are incredibly individual and personal experiences, and no person should be forced to follow a path dictated by people with power simply based on genitalia, completely disregarding the harm that could cause.

Mandating genitalia checks and androgen checks will ultimately create a bigger problem than SB208 proposes regarding the incorporation of transgender and genderqueer students deciding their teams based on sex rather than gender. Not only is it a revolting intrusion into a student's privacy, this unnecessary degradation further alienates those students and fails to take their mental health and well-being into consideration, prioritizes traditionalism, and allows

lawmakers, without the necessary expertise, to make such a decision. Furthermore, if these genitalia, hormonal, and/or genetic tests must be performed on students accused of being genderqueer, they should also be administered to every athlete wishing to participate in a school sport. It is not only inappropriate to single out those that are already unjustly experiencing the impact of outdated principles, but unfair that they should not pertain to the entirety of the body of Kansas students. Aside from the lack of morality and compassion behind this proposed law, the gatekeeping through medical exams brings a heightened sense of dysphoria and dysmorphia. This could be avoided if the legislative body shifted their priorities from being referees in a game of school basketball, to relevant problems in Kansas that could provide positive benefits to the population, rather than worsen the social environment in the state.

My best friend should be writing this, sharing his own experiences and the devastating impact that anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation in this state had on his short life. I should not have to write this small part of his beautiful story for him, but I will fight for him with as much passion as he fought these laws while he was here.

No student, regardless of gender, sex, orientation, or identity, should be excluded from experiencing life simply because someone else chose to let the label placed upon them overshadow the numerous other unique qualities they could have been able to present to the world.

