

Legislative Testimony

Pastor Isabel Call

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Manhattan, Kansas

HB 2300 Clergy Mandatory Reporting

March 13, 2024

Representatives,

Thank you for receiving my testimony in support of HB 2300.

It takes a village to raise a child, and religious communities are an essential part of the village. As a pastor, I am accountable to my congregation, my national religious community, and to God to care for children and their caregivers. If ever I hear of abuse of a child, I must act. But I cannot act alone. The child and our community deserve the support of legal intention.

My professional and vocational training has equipped me to handle sensitive community and family matters with privacy, but it does not give me the authority to keep toxic secrets. Child abuse, in particular, persists in secrecy. Abusers leverage their power over the vulnerable to limit their choices and their access to information and help. They create an environment of shame and confusion for the abused child. As a spiritual leader and moral authority in my community, to keep this secret is to affirm the abuser's behavior, which makes me complicit in the abuse. While I can hold abusers accountable through direct address and limiting their access to my congregation, I cannot compel them to change. And in most cases, I have no way to remove a child from their influence. We, as citizens, defer that authority to the law. Any neglect on my part to make use of the legal structure to protect children or hold abusers accountable inappropriately sends the message that I, and the spiritual law I represent, condone the abuse.

I support the requirement that clergy report child abuse. My colleagues of faith and I should be accountable not just to our spiritual truths and religious institutions, but also to the State, to protect the most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Pastor Isabel Call