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Kansas Catholic Conference
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Date: March 12, 2024

To: Madam Chair Susan Humphries and members of the House Judiciary Committee.

From: Chuck Weber, Executive Director, Kansas Catholic Conference

RE: Written only PROPONENT testimony for HB 2300 Requiring a duly ordained minister of religion to report certain abuse and neglect of children except when reporting would violate the penitential communication privilege.

Madam Chair Humphries and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2300. Our position in favor of this specific legislative proposal has been consistent since it was first filed in 2019.

The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological, and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. The Catholic Bishops of Kansas acknowledge the pain and suffering endured by all victims of sexual abuse, most particularly those hurt by members of the Catholic clergy. We cannot say "I am sorry" enough, but we must also act. And we have.

For at least two decades, members of the Catholic clergy in Kansas have been trained, and continue to be trained, to identify and report instances of sexual abuse as a condition of their employment. Put another way, the mandated reporting elements of HB 2300 are already in place with members of the Catholic clergy in Kansas.

Catholic clergy, trained and obligated to report abuse, is part of what the Catholic Church in Kansas has created and implemented as a "Gold Standard" of safe environments for children. This initiative includes background checks for those at school or church who are in regular contact with children, mandated monthly training for Catholic employees and volunteers in contact with children via [VIRTUS® Online \(virtusonline.org\)](https://virtusonline.org), and other protocols, practices and safeguards. We are happy to share details of this initiative upon request.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2300.

Gerald C. "Chuck" Weber
Executive Director, Kansas Catholic Conference

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