

Dr. Briana McGeough
House District 45
Testimony in Opposition of HB 2238

My name is Dr. Briana McGeough, and I am an Assistant Professor in the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare and the co-founder/director of the Center for LGBTQ+ Research and Advocacy. My testimony is offered in my personal capacity as an expert in the field of LGBTQ mental health and informed by my years of research and mental health practice in this field, not as a representative of the University of Kansas. My research focuses on understanding mental health challenges experienced by LGBTQ individuals, including transgender youth, and identifying strategies to promote the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ individuals.

I am testifying today because I strongly oppose HB 2238, and I am concerned about the impact that this policy could have on the mental health of transgender youth. Although I oppose this bill for many reasons, particularly because it denies transgender youth equitable access to educational opportunities, today I will focus on the body of research that shows the direct harm that this bill will have on the mental health of transgender youth.

My research and that of other leading scholars consistently demonstrates that having a strong network of social support contributes to better mental health for LGBTQ individuals,¹ including transgender youth.² Participation in sports has many benefits for youth and has been linked to improved mental health outcomes and community support.³ Further, participating in sports may be particularly critical for the mental health and well-being of transgender youth, who routinely experience bullying and victimization in schools.⁴ Given the benefits of participating in sports, particularly for youth who experience marginalization, it is absolutely critical that transgender youth are given equitable access to participating in sports, including the ability to play on teams that align with their gender identity.

Not only would this bill, if enacted into law, contribute to mental health problems for transgender youth by restricting their access to healthy and beneficial activities, it also directly enacts stigma and discrimination, contributing to worse mental health for these youth. Research has shown that legislation designed to restrict transgender youth from spaces and resources that other youth have access to is related to increased mental health challenges, including suicidality,

¹ Briana L. McGeough et al., "Understanding the Social and Community Support Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Individuals in 12-Step Programs," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 0, no. 0 (January 25, 2023): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538720.2023.2172759>.

² Elizabeth A. McConnell, Michelle Birkett, and Brian Mustanski, "Families Matter: Social Support and Mental Health Trajectories Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 59, no. 6 (December 1, 2016): 674–80, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.07.026>.

³ Caitlin M. Clark and Joseph G. Kosciw, "Engaged or Excluded: LGBTQ Youth's Participation in School Sports and Their Relationship to Psychological Well-being," *Psychology in the Schools* 59, no. 1 (January 2022): 95–114, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22500>.

⁴ Clark and Kosciw; Michelle M. Johns et al., "Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students — 19 States and Large Urban School Districts, 2017," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 68, no. 3 (January 25, 2019): 67–71, <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6803a3>.

among transgender youth.⁵ Furthermore, research conducted in Kansas shows that even merely proposing discriminatory policies, such as this one, harms transgender youth by exposing them to the message that they do not deserve equitable access to essential community support and resources.⁶

In sum, this bill aims to reduce transgender youths' access to healthy activities that offer youth social, physical, and mental health benefits. This discrimination is most concerning because research makes clear that access to healthy activities is even more crucial for transgender youth due to the high rates of bullying and victimization that they experience. This bill serves to codify discrimination against transgender youth, further contributing to mental health challenges, including suicidality, for these youth. As a researcher and mental health service provider committed to the mental health of transgender youth, I urge you to vote against this bill.

⁵ Amaya Perez-Brumer et al., "Individual- and Structural-Level Risk Factors for Suicide Attempts Among Transgender Adults," *Behavioral Medicine* 41, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 164–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08964289.2015.1028322>.

⁶ Megan S. Pacey et al., "'It Feels like Home': Transgender Youth in the Midwest and Conceptualizations of Community Climate," *Journal of Community Psychology* 48, no. 6 (2020): 1863–81, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22378>.