

To: House Education Committee
Att: Rep. Adam Thomas, Chair
Re: HB 2238
To be heard: Monday, 2/13 at 1:30pm

IN OPPOSITION

My name is Pastor Isabel Call, and I'm the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Manhattan, KS. I am testifying against HB 2238. It is based on an antiquated understanding of sex and gender and forces schools to discriminate against a certain group of children.

Unitarian Universalists affirm that living one's identity is part of our free exercise of religion. Our faith has publicly called for transgender-affirming actions for over three decades. Trans, nonbinary, and intersex people are a cherished part of our religious community.

People who come out as trans do so at immense risk. Yet despite the physical violence and emotional abuse that trans people endure, many continue living their truth. Legalizing discrimination against an already marginalized group is hardly an act of love. Caring for transgender girls doesn't mean neglecting care for cisgender girls; on the contrary, they are stronger together. Prohibiting trans girls from playing sports with their friends simply sends a message to all girls that they are not welcome as themselves. It reinforces a culture of gender policing that reverberates through a community, increasing conformity and fear.

Trans girls should be seen as role models for the people around them — including us older people — who keep our true selves hidden for fear of being judged and bullied.

As a cisgender woman, I used to be uncomfortable around trans people. Several years ago, I had a serious accident and found myself in the ICU for several weeks. Every day, the x-ray technician came to take a picture of my lungs. I was suspicious of her strong jaw and large frame, which I felt didn't fit her feminine clothes. Everything in my world had been turned upside down and I just wanted normalcy. She was clearly uncomfortable too, uneasy when I glared at her and worried about hurting my broken back when she positioned me. But she kept coming back, doing her job. I became more familiar with her as a person rather than as an "other." I realized she was living the best life she could and that I had the choice to do so as well. My body, now disabled, might not be what society considered "normal," but if this trans woman could make a life and career for herself despite the judgements of people around her, I could too. And if I wanted the world to be a place where I could thrive as a person with my changed body, I would need to offer grace for others. A few years later, one of my best friends came out as a trans woman. As she gradually replaced her wardrobe and adopted new ways of moving in the world, I could only feel joy for the way that her mental health and self esteem improved.

I would have benefited from learning these lessons at a younger age, but transphobia was so severe that I had few trans role models. But I'm grateful for what I did learn — both at church, where I was taught that all people have inherent worth — and in sports, where I learned to

cooperate. Though there were no trans girls on my middle school basketball team, we were diverse in other ways. I was terrible at shooting, but I brought decent defense. I felt valued for my intimidating glares at the opponents, my encouragement of my teammates, and my willingness to keep trying and learning. The point was not whether we won but how good we could be to each other while we played.

I oppose the so-called “fairness in women’s sports act” because I want people of all genders to have a fair shot at full lives. The presence of trans kids on sports teams is good for us all. I want the legislature to stop trying to police people’s bodies and instead find ways for all of us to play. While my story is my own, I share it with the support of my religious community. We side with love, and will always welcome and advocate for transgender kids. They deserve the chance to participate fully in their communities and their schools.

Sincerely,
Rev. Dr. Isabel Call
Minister at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Manhattan
Manhattan, Kansas