

Opponent Testimony of HB 2238

For the House Committee on Education

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Chair Thomas and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2238. This bill will have a negative impact on trans children growing up in Kansas, many of whom are my clients.

Through a Skadden Fellowship, I run the Kansas Name Change Project, where I provide free legal representation to low-income transgender Kansans seeking name changes, identity document corrections, and other civil legal services. I work day in and day out with Kansas' trans communities, but I am especially proud to represent trans youth. They are kids like any others: They are wonderful, funny, full of potential. They know themselves, and want the world to know them for who they really are. They seek friends, family, and a community who will love and support them as they grow up.

From my experience representing trans kids, though, I have learned that trans youth face unique barriers and frustrations that other children won't experience. The research tells a sad story: Trans youth, like all trans people, are at high risk of experiencing harassment and violence just for being themselves. Trans youth are more likely to experience isolation and bullying than cisgender children. They are more likely to have severe anxiety and depression than cisgender kids. In fact, a poll conducted by the Trevor Project in 2021 shows that legislation like House Bill 2238 worsens the already-bad mental health of LGBTQ youth.

This bill will have a profound negative impact on many of my clients, and other trans youth like them. You will hear plenty of people testify that sports changed their lives for the better: Sports provide youth with team-building and conflict-resolution skills; sports can create a community of friends and family that will support each other years to come; sports instill in young people a work ethic, a sense of purpose, and lifelong habits that support their physical and mental health. By banning trans youth from participating in sports, HB 2238 denies trans youth each and every one of these opportunities. This bill isolates these kids, who are already at high risk of isolation and self-harm. This bill pushes trans youth further to the margins of society simply because of their identities.

Trans kids deserve the chance to play. They deserve the chance to grow, learn, and participate as much as any other kids, because they *are* any other kids. As an advocate for low-income Kansans, I believe we should do everything in our power to make sure youth have the support they need to grow up and live active, healthy, joyful, connected lives. This bill will make that goal harder for trans youth.

Thank you very much for your time.