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Testimony in Opposition to HB 2792 By Rev. Charles McKinzie
House Committee on Health and Human Services, Rep. Brenda Landwehr, chair
February 29, 2024

Mme. Chair, Members of the Committee:

I am Ptr. Charles McKinzie. I serve as senior pastor of Grace United Methodist Church in Winfield, and I am testifying on my behalf and on behalf of Kansas Interfaith Action, the statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that represents several of the primary Mainline denominations, as well as Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities and individuals throughout the state. I rise in opposition to HB 2792.

The primary concern of the Christian community should be to attune to Jesus' words when he was asked what was the greatest law. His reply was to love God and love neighbor - telling us that on these two ideals all other laws and commandments hang. I stand today to ask that this kind of grace be extended to transitioning youth, as they desire to present their truest selves in the world. As a pastor for gender fluid, non-binary, and trans folks, and their families and communities, my prayerful reflection is that they, like all of us, are created in the divine image of a loving God.

The diversity of human sexuality and identities reflect the glory and majesty of a God in whose image they are created and loved. Just as God created night and day, God made dusk and dawn and twilight. Throughout creation we see evidence that the simple binaries we try to impose on God's creation are too small and inadequate to categorize what actually exists. So too is it with humans. It is up to those of us who love transgender persons to support them as they develop and explore their identities - even, or I should say especially, if those explorations are unconventional or uncomfortable for the rest of us. I would also suggest that it is the job of this committee to represent their best interests, just as much as others in your communities or the talking heads on Fox News.

I want to add some context to what it means to be trans today. A recent paper in the National Journal of Psychological Medicine said the following about transgender people:¹

Gender-based victimization, discrimination, bullying, violence, being rejected by the family, friends, and community; harassment by intimate partner, family members, police and public; discrimination and ill treatment at health-care system are the major risk factors that influence the suicidal behavior among transgender persons. These factors all contribute to the suicide attempt rate among transgender persons ranging from 32-50% depending on location.

The UCLA School of Law recently wrote that Transgender people are over FOUR times more likely than others to be the victim of a violent crime.

It is literally a life-threatening danger to be transgender. If you had any lingering doubt whether a trans person is simply "choosing a lifestyle," let that be put to bed. No one would *want* to take on an identity which puts them

¹ Suicide and Suicidal Behavior among Transgender Persons, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28031583/>

at great risk for violence and death. Being an out trans person is an act of bravery and courage that those of us with more conventional gender identities will simply never be able to understand

Interfering with transgender people's ability to access care will make all of these factors worse.

Faith leaders and denominational bodies are deeply alarmed about the impact of this bill on transitioning youth and their families, and the undue stress it will create on medical providers who wish to provide their patients the best standards of care. As part of my testimony I am including a letter signed by over 100 faith leaders throughout Kansas demanding that the state legislature stop trying to pass laws discriminating against trans people.

Kansas Interfaith Action opposes HB 2792 for three main reasons:

First, and most important, gender-affirming care is life-saving care. Medical care for gender dysphoria is evidence-based, medically necessary, and safe—which is why every major medical association advocates *against* bills like this. HB 2792 is an attack on the dignity of and right to medical access for a vulnerable group of citizens. Patients, families, and their doctors should have the freedom to make their own private medical decisions—not politicians.

Second, this is a big government solution which puts this legislature's opinions directly into choices that are better left between the patient receiving care, their parents/representatives, and their medical providers. In several cases over the past couple of years this legislature has argued for greater control by parents, particularly in educational curriculum and vaccine mandates. So why doesn't this parental right also apply to parents of trans kids, and trans kids themselves, whose faith teaches them to affirm and celebrate gender diversity beyond the binary? Yet in this case the legislature wants to prioritize its opinions - and its religious beliefs - above the consideration of parents, who know and love their children and want what's best for them.

Thirdly, HB 2792 has a negative impact on medical providers who have chosen their profession for reasons which include enabling their patients to have full, healthy, and fulfilled lives. This bill compromises the integrity of the medical community by forcing doctors to do their job as the legislature dictates—rather than as the best practice standards of care for their profession direct them to.

I would like to take a moment to raise the name of Nex Benedict, a gender-non-conforming teenager who lived only three hours from my home in their hometown of Owasso, Oklahoma, who had the breath of life beaten from them by students who were motivated by the hatred and intolerance of politicians in their state. This is the nightmare of everyone who loves a trans, non-binary, or gender-nonconforming person. Transphobia has consequences, and they can be deadly. I didn't disclose this fully when I began, but I rise also on behalf of my 16-year-old, non-binary child. The death of Nex Benedict did not happen in a vacuum. It happened in a state where bullies have been led to believe that there will be no consequences for violence because people in power have stoked the fires of intolerance and venomous behaviors.

Legislation like this puts politicians in Topeka in the middle of the most sacred relationships: between parents and children, between patients and providers, between the child and their truest self, and between these people and God. You have no call to do this, and you have no right to do this.

There is no compelling reason for this legislature to force its ill-formed opinions onto medical professionals and parents in this state. I urge you to oppose HB 2792. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

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January 31, 2024

Dear Kansas Legislators:

As we prepare for the new legislative session, we write to you as clergy and leaders of faith communities throughout Kansas. Our faith is the foundation on which our political priorities are built. We care deeply about our neighbors - all of them, and especially the most vulnerable among us. As you know, people of faith make up a significant part of your constituency. We remain fully engaged and trust that you will continue as steadfast partners in creating needed change.

Mainstream faith communities across Kansas share values of safety, equality, and dignity for each and every person. We're called to do no harm, and to do all the good we can. Discriminatory legislation that targets individuals based on sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity is an affront to the values we hold as people of faith and as Kansans. Alarmist language, fear-based rhetoric, and general mis- or disinformation fuels discrimination, and discrimination does great harm.

While we may hold differing teachings on LGBTQ+ issues in religious life, we join in common cause against any policy which might cause hurt or harm to people, no matter who they are. We, the undersigned clergy, call on all our elected leaders to hear our collective voice as we urge you to reject any further discriminatory legislation targeting our LGBTQ+ siblings. We believe such legislation has already caused severe damage to our LGBTQ+ friends and neighbors; is antithetical to the rights of equal opportunity and equal protection guaranteed in our state and federal constitutions; is contrary to the human rights to which we are all entitled; and is sinful in the eyes of a loving and merciful God.

As we look across the history of humankind, acts of discrimination have never fared well, and in the end those who perpetuate it are viewed by history as oppressors. Do not allow that to be the legacy of your service in our state legislature.

We are counting on your voice and your vote in the pursuit of safety, equality, and dignity for all Kansans, including LGBTQ+ Kansans. Let your legacy be one of mercy and justice for all. We pray for you as our leaders.

With both gratitude and great expectation,

Clergy and Leaders of Faith Communities in Kansas

Rev. Mitch Todd
Grace United Methodist Church, Olathe

Deacon Mindy Tillberg
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Salina

Neal Whitlow, Adult Discipleship
Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, Wichita

Pastor Shana Green
New Creation Fellowship Church, Newton

Rev. Chad Langdon
Christ Lutheran Church, Wichita

Pastor Bev Baumgartner
Eden Mennonite Church, Moundridge

Pastor Kane McEntire
West Heights United Methodist Church, Wichita

Rev. Amy Truhe
Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lindsborg

Rev. Ashley Prescott Barlow-Thompson
Calvary United Methodist Church, Wichita

Pastor Charles McKinzie
Grace United Methodist Church, Winfield

Pastor Christina Manero
Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, Wichita

Rev. Lorraine Cenicerros
UCC KO Conference Minister, Junction City

Rev. Gary Teske, *retired*
Trinity Lutheran Church, Lawrence

Rev. Dr. Peter Luckey, *retired*
Plymouth Congregational Church, Lawrence

Rev. Dr. Isabel Call
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Manhattan

Rev. Dr. Mandy Todd
Bethany Village, Lindsborg

Rev. Dr. Annie Ricker
Shawnee Heights United Methodist Church, Tecumseh
Berryton United Methodist Church, Berryton

Rev. Jill Sander-Chali
College Hill United Methodist Church, Wichita

Rev. Dr. S. David Cox
St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church, Mission

Rev. Jody Carroll, Canon
Grace Cathedral, Topeka

Rev. Torey Lightcap
Grace Cathedral, Topeka

Deacon Carolyn Garwood
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Manhattan

Pastor Gene McIntosh
Harveyville United Methodist Church, Harveyville

Rev. Denise Dugan
Saint Andrew Christian Church, Olathe

Pastor Melissa Atchison
Manhattan Mennonite Church, Manhattan

Rev. Shelley Page
Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Lawrence

Rev. Pat Ireland
First Presbyterian Church, Cottonwood Falls

Pastor Laura Guy
Regional Congregational Engagement Director, DART

Rev. Aaron Roberts
Colonial Church, Prairie Village

Dr. Edith Guffey, *retired*
Former Kansas-Oklahoma Conference Minister, UCC

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Westside Presbyterian Church, Lawrence

Pastor Roxie Baer
Oak Hill Presbyterian Church
Faith United Presbyterian Church, Clifton

Rev. K.O. Noonoo
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Rev. Thad Holcombe, *retired*
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Revered Marc Giedinhagen, *retired*
St. Luke's Hospital Chaplain

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First Presbyterian Church, Lawrence

Rev. Ashley Huber
St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Olathe

Rev. Chris Deines
Bethany Lutheran Church, Lindsborg

Rev. Cheryl Hoops
Grace Presbyterian, Wichita

Rev. Adam Wutka
Central States Synod ELCA, Great Bend

Rev. John Brudvig
Salem Lutheran Church, Lenexa

Rev. Jennifer Thomas
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Shawnee

Pastor Austin English
Peace Lutheran Church, Manhattan

Rabbi Jonathan Rudnick
Jewish Family Services Community Chaplain

Rabbi Elizabeth Bonney-Cohen
Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy, Overland Park

Rabbi Mark Levin, *retired*
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Rabbi Larry Karol, *retired*
Overland Park

Rabbi Michael Zedek, *retired*
Prairie Village

Zen Master Bon Hae Judith Roitman
Kansas Zen Center, Lawrence

Pastor Jerrell Williams
Shalom Mennonite Church, Newton

Rev. Charles Claycomb, *retired*
Great Plains UMC, Wichita

Rev. Noni Strand
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Rev. Shannah McAleer
St. Paul United Church of Christ, Eudora

Pastor Laura Goerzen
First Mennonite Church, Newton

Rev. Jennifer Herndon
Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, Wichita

Rev. Mindy Fugarino
Independence Boulevard Christian Church, Kansas City

Rev. Laurie Lewis
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Rev. Kaylie Ines
Walsburg Lutheran Church, Leonardville

Rev. Daekyung Kim
Asbury United Methodist Church, Prairie Village

Rev. Russell Anderson
Mulvane United Methodist Church, Mulvane

Rev. Joanna Harader
Peace Mennonite Church, Lawrence

Pastor Jeff Graber
First United Methodist Church, Halstead

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Great Plains United Methodist Church, Leawood

Pastor Nathan Koontz
Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton

Rev. Robert Johnson
Resurrection UMC, Leawood

Rev. Doreen Rice
St. David's Episcopal, Topeka

Rev. Dr. Tiffany DeTienne
United Methodist Church, Lawrence

Pastor Todd Seifert
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McLouth United Methodist Church
First United Methodist Church, Oskaloosa

Rev. Ross Baker
Edgerton United Methodist Church, Edgerton

Rev. Deborah Hull
Old Mission United Methodist Church, Fairway

Rev. Philip Shull
Great Plains UMC, Bel Aire

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College Avenue United Methodist Church, Manhattan

Rev. Gage Church
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Rev. Jacob Pointdexter
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