

Thursday, February 29, 2024
House Committee on Health and Human Services
Rep. Brenda Landwehr, Chair

Kristen Satterwhite
Parent

HB 2792 - Prohibiting gender transition surgery on minors, authorizing professional discipline against a physician who performs such surgeries and adopting a standard of care for gender transition care services.

Opponent - Written and Oral

Chair Landwehr and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on HB2792.

My name is Kristen Satterwhite and I am an Overland Park resident and parent of a 15-year-old transgender boy. My husband and I have been on a journey of learning, discovering, understanding, investigating, and researching for over a decade now, as our child began showing signs of gender dysphoria from the age of 3. We started quietly processing, learning, and preparing for what we felt may come to reality down the road.

We were also feeling fearful, as we lived in Texas, a state not known for its embracing of the LGBTQ community. We were afraid to let him express his authentic self at that age for fear of the unkindness he may have received from adults in our community, the very people who are supposed to make children feel safe.

Our son grew up enjoying swim team, taekwondo, church youth group, bike-riding with friends, many of the same things that any child does throughout childhood. Rather than approaching the subject with him, we waited for him to organically arrive at his own feelings about his identity. He ultimately came out to us as transgender at 13. We were not surprised. We took a breath and felt proud that he was more brave than we. It is indeed, very brave to be your authentic self when adults are telling you you're wrong and, in Texas, that your parents should be reported to child protective services for supporting you.

After much thought, conversation, and consultation with our team of medical and mental health professionals, with whom we have now developed relationships and whom we trust, we made the decision to begin gender-affirming care for our son.

I feel very strongly that these important and private decisions must be made by professionals in the field and our family alone. No one else. I honestly resent that I had to take time away from my family and my responsibilities today to share my child's private medical history with all of you, but I am very concerned that this bill will disrupt the care that we have worked so hard to secure. Furthermore, codifying medical guidelines into law would hinder our doctors' abilities to provide the most up-to-date care available. I can't imagine a law that would mandate that pediatric oncologists, for example, provide cancer treatments to children in accordance with guidelines from 2017. That would be absurd, as we want to ensure that all children have access to the most current life-saving services. And indeed, gender-affirming care is life-saving care.

We relocated to Overland Park from Houston and part of that was our hope for a safer and more welcoming experience in Kansas than what we were finding in Texas, but these legislative attacks on our family and our child's healthcare have left us disappointed. In so many ways, I

have been very happy with the life that we've built for ourselves in Kansas, thanks to our wonderful neighbors, the sense of community we find around us, and the supportive administration at our children's schools. However, my super-awesome, intelligent, and driven child (who has the potential to become an engaged, productive adult citizen, inspired to make the world a better place)— he is hearing the shaming rhetoric. He is taking in the assumptions and criticisms about our family, and he's feeling unseen and misunderstood. When he finishes high school, he does not want to go to college in Kansas. He wants to be free to focus on his education without the distraction of being targeted year after year by lawmakers who have never walked in his shoes. I have been researching ways that our family could afford to send him to school out of state, and if we are able to pull it off, it truly will be a loss for the state of Kansas because he's a great human and he will be an asset wherever he lands.

We've been able to approach our child's experience with empathy because earlier in our lives, my husband and I each had the unique privilege of knowing transgender people and seeing their transitions unfold. We witnessed over the years as they evolved into thriving adults with great careers and fulfilling lives, thanks to the support of their families and the fact that their health and medical diagnoses and treatment plans were not being debated by legislators.

They are thriving and living peaceful lives now and we want our child to have the same opportunity. We'd like to pay forward that privilege that we had of knowing real people, so I want you all to know that I'm here. My door is open and if you would like to know more about what this experience has truly been like for us, I would love to talk with you. I sincerely hope, with the power that you wield to impact my child's life and health, that you would actually have the curiosity to dig deeper and develop your empathy before injecting the state into our personal and private medical experience.

Please oppose HB 2792 and allow us to determine what is best for our child.

Thank you.

Kristen Satterwhite