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HB 2311Oral Opponent Testimony
House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care

Chair Howerton and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak here today in strong opposition of HB 2311.

I care deeply about and feel deeply connected to the child welfare system. Both my mother and her mother before her are adopted. My mother has spent more than two decades running the nursery of the church in Overland Park where I was raised, where I volunteered every Sunday and for many cycles of VBS. I formerly worked at a daycare in Stillwell, and I am now finishing up the last bit of my certification process with Douglas County CASA. I hope to become a foster parent one day when I have the space. I have worked with and known countless kids in the foster care system. The state has a clear, vested interest in ensuring every child has a roof over their head, no doubt. However, child safety is incomplete until psychological and emotional safety are considered.

And I am a former queer kid myself. I say that not because I "grew out of" my queerness, but because I feel so lucky to have made it long enough to become a living, breathing queer adult. That means something as someone who for many years didn't think I was going to let myself get that far.

Kids need the state's protection from all forms of neglect and abuse. Allowing them to be placed in homes with foster parents who will invalidate their queerness and see to change and fix that which is not broken only compounds existing traumas and risks dangerous mental health crises. I was the queer kid whose mom read my texts and rushed me to the Johnson County Mental Health Center for emergency services when I was sixteen. I knew my family and faith community were safe people on this matter and yet sometimes existing as a queer person in this country and state still feels impossibly hard. I am a born and raised Kansan and I will live die here too. No amount of frustrating bills will ever take my home away from me, and yet, the legislature's priority over the past few years on targeting queer kids has been exhausting.

I only very recently officially came out to my mom at age 22. I figured she knew, but it was still so hard to say. I only told her on January 28th when I was crying in my car in the parking garage across the street after attending the hearings on SB 63. Because, the truth is, as much as these types of bills will do harm when passed, the constant barrage of transphobic headlines signaling that your government doesn't believe you or love you enough to keep you safe is already doing harm right now. Every bill given a hearing is a tradeoff and an opportunity cost. It breaks my heart to see that this is what the legislature likes to spend so much of their precious few 90 days on.

As I called my mom that day, so drained by it all, I heard her voice break as she asked me where I was and if I was safe. I reassured her that this was not that kind of call, and then

she gave me her favorite line, “You know it's my job to worry,” because that is what a good, safe, loving parent does.

It is hard to be a kid. It is hard to be a person. It is hard to be queer. It is hard for kids to grow up in foster care. There is no reason we can’t choose to lead with kindness and protection instead of compounding the pain of their hardest moments. I feel so lucky to have the support I have. Please vote no and see to it that everyone else gets the same.

There are so many wonderful foster homes out there, I know we need more, but we still need to make sure that queer kids are placed in safe and accepting environments. Foster kids are already an exceptionally vulnerable population and if we want them to grow to be confident, happy, resilient adults, we need to reject HB 2311. Queer acceptance is the most basic safety planning we can offer these children.