

For the Senate Education Committee

Date of Hearing: Monday, Feb. 10, 1:30 p.m.

Name: Chris Jones

Dear Chair Erickson and Members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 76. I will appear at the hearing in person to deliver testimony. My opposition to the bill stems from three distinct considerations.

First, I am the parent of two children in the Topeka school district. We are not from Kansas, but we moved here eight years ago in part because we had heard such good things about the school district's commitment to fair and accessible education for all students. This bill would work directly against those things. Extensive research across multiple disciplines shows that LGBTQ youth experience better outcomes (in their learning as well as in their mental health) when their educators affirm their own sense of who they are (by calling them by the names and pronouns that they choose). I know some of you are skeptical about whether or not a child can make a decision like that for themselves; I can affirm, from my own personal experience, that they most certainly can, and that if their caregivers shame them for their preferences, the effects are disastrous.

Every 45 seconds in the U.S., a trans person tries to take their own life. Bills like this undeniably add to the stress and pain that trans people feel when their own society rejects them. I know you are not people who want to contribute to suicidal ideation among an already-vulnerable population.

Second, I am also an educator. I teach in higher education in Kansas, at a public institution. I can tell you, from countless personal experiences, that trans and non-binary students thrive when their teachers accept them for who they really are and celebrate their distinct identities, and they suffer tremendously when their teachers refuse to show them that acceptance. Imagine that you are a student, and everywhere you go people call you a name that you reject and use pronouns that don't fit your own understanding of yourself. Don't you think that that would have a negative effect on you? Wouldn't that make you not want to go to school in the first place? My goal as a professor is to ensure that as many of my students as possible complete their degrees and enter the Kansas workforce prepared to succeed. SB76 works directly against that goal, too.

Finally, I write to you as a Midwesterner. I know I'm not a native Kansan, but I moved here in part because people are *nice* here. I've lived in places where people are rude to you and call you names. I don't like it. Here in the Midwest, we just call people what they want to be called. I have a friend whose given name is Paul. Everybody calls him Tater. Nobody has any idea why he goes by Tater. *Nobody cares*. That's because this is the Midwest. We accept people for who they are, and we call them whatever they want to be called, whether or not we understand it. SB76 fundamentally opposes that Midwestern spirit.

I urge you to let this bill die in committee. Kansas doesn't need it. It's not who we are.

Sincerely,

Chris Jones