

LOUD LIGHT CIVIC ACTION

Melissa Stiehler
Loud Light Civic Action
Opponent Testimony of SB 76
For the Senate Education Committee

February 10th, 2025

Chair Erickson and members of the Committee,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Melissa Stiehler, and I serve as Advocacy Director of Loud Light Civic Action, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that supports and builds the civic engagement and leadership of young people in Kansas. We represent over 12,000 Kansans, including supporters in every House and Senate district across the state. Loud Light Civic Action unapologetically supports the LGBTQ+ community, including their right to live a happy, healthy life that is free from government interference in their ability to be themselves in public life. It is with these values that Loud Light Civic Action strongly opposes SB 76.

Concern: This Bill Does Not Protect Free Speech, Encourages Harassment and Frivolous Litigation

While this bill frames issues of gender and how other people live their lives as an issue of “public concern,” one in which education professionals should be encouraged to share their opinion on in order to shape “classroom discussion and debate,” the reality is that it is no one’s business but the person at hand. In fact, when asked in a recent survey, the grand majority of Kansans said they believe transgender folks deserve legal protections in public places, like our schools and colleges. This bill frames the act of following the golden rule, treating others the way they would like to be treated, as if they are somehow victimized by the existence of these children. Beyond the bill framing, section 1(e) actually empowers frivolous litigation over the so-called “harm” caused to those who go into hysterics just by overhearing a name or pronoun they don’t like. Rather than passing legislation to coddle the irrational feeling of this overly fragile minority, it would be wise to encourage them to study the art of minding one’s own business.

Concern: This Bill Violates Students Rights while Protecting Bullies

Section 1(c) and 1(d) of SB 76 bans any disciplinary action against school employees and students for misgendering and deadnaming their classmates. Section 1(b) bans the free speech of employees who want to treat the child the way they want to be treated, while also requiring parents to disclose in writing personal, private information about the student. The reality is that there is no effective means of ensuring every school employee and student has the knowledge of every other student’s name and sex listed on their birth certificate, nor should there be. How would one enforce this law without violating a student’s right to privacy? It is in the public interest that the private information about sex and gender diversity of minors not be public knowledge, as it is in all of our best interest to protect the right to privacy. Speculation about this information has not been beneficial to the public. This has largely led to grown women confronting other women while they are just trying to use the restroom, such as can be seen when recently, Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado incorrectly identified and confronted another woman in the restroom of Congress, only to be mistaken and have to issue a public apology. Bringing this kind of behavior and speculation into our classrooms can only lead to embarrassment, bullying, and a hostile environment for Kansas kids and school employees.

Concern: Government Restrictions on Kansans' Freedom of Self Determination

One of the most fundamental values of a free society is its people being able to shape their own life without interference or discrimination from their government. SB 76 is a classic example of a violation of Kansans' right to self-determination. Efforts like SB 76 are blunt attempts to "legislate away" transgender Kansans by creating government bans on how a student is allowed to live their public life. Children are reliant on the adults in their life that are tasked with caring for them. This bill bans those adults from acknowledging that child's sense of self and personal expression. This bill will have the practical impact of government mandated restrictions on the child themselves. Simply put, it is not the government's business to mandate these things. Interference like this will make for a less free society for all Kansans.

For these reasons, Loud Light Civic Action strongly urges members of this committee to oppose SB 76, and urges the legislature to please, leave transgender children and their families alone. It is not in the best interest for this legislature to place themselves in the middle of decisions best left to a child and their family. Thank you all for your time and I hope you take my testimony into consideration.