

Emerson Hoffzales

Public School Educator

Written and Oral Testimony – Opponent

Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee

Senate Bill 63

January 28, 2025

Chairperson Gossage, members of the Committee:

Hello, I am Emerson Hoffzales, my pronouns are they/them/theirs. I am an 8th year secondary English educator in Lawrence, Kansas.

It brings me joy to be in the town that I live in, seeing my students when I run errands and see them working. Recently, I did a double take at a restaurant when I saw a student from my first year in the classroom. She was cleaning up tables and restocking items, when we spent a solid 10 minutes talking about how she was doing and what her plans were in between each task. What hurt the most was hearing that she dropped out of school later in the year that I had her because she was not affirmed in her identity. Her access to a public school education was cut short due to the simple act of not respecting her choices to socially transition. I wish I could say that this is the first time I have heard of this.

We all know that it is imperative for educators to support students in their educational journey, but we cannot do this without meeting the student's needs first. A student's ability to learn is limited to how well their needs are provided outside of the classroom. If a student is hungry or unsure how they are getting home, they will not be able to focus on the material. It is all too common you will see me handing out snacks while engaging students in a literary analysis of a Shakespeare play. You will see me talking to each student one-on-one during our essay revising workshops and will see me giving a student resources from the school's social worker so they are able to get home safely. The social issues within my classroom are so intertwined with educational access that one cannot happen without the other.

The same access that my student missed out on was because an educator would not refer to her by her name or her pronouns. Two simple asks made by the student were ignored which caused this student to not feel welcomed in class. To create an environment in my classroom so each student feels safe enough to stay to learn, I have to meet their needs. When I refer to a student by the name they have asked me to use or their preferred pronouns, I am supporting my students. I am making their education more accessible by making them feel as safe as I can and welcoming them into the classroom by respecting their freedom of expression.

On behalf of fellow educators and supporters of our transgender students, I ask you to oppose this bill.