

Isaac Johnson
January 28, 2025
Oral Testimony - SB 63
Opposition

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the time to speak on SB 63. My name is Isaac Johnson and I am an LMSW who lives in Douglas County. Today, I am encouraging the committee to vote no on SB 63.

I became a social worker because of the struggles I faced in childhood. I specialized in school social work and spent two internships working with youth between 5 and 16. Many of the children I worked with came from incredibly traumatic backgrounds. To them, I was one of the only adults they trusted. I gained their trust by allowing them to ask questions and discuss concerns without any judgement.

Withholding judgement does not mean unconditional support. It means that they understood that I would not become angry or refuse to listen to them. This approach is what establishes the working relationship that influences them to make decisions that help instead of harm. Not only is this a successful approach, but it's an obligatory one. The NASW Code of Ethics, which I follow as a social worker, mandates respect for all people and their autonomy.

However, I am concerned that SB 63 would contradict my ethical obligations and hinder working relationships with youth. The mention of First Amendment rights in the bill does not explain what is and isn't protected. For example, a boy I worked with often enjoyed traditionally feminine things. If he came into school one day wearing girl's clothes and asked me what I thought of his outfit, would I be "promoting" social transitioning if I complimented him? Does the answer change when you know that he identified as trans before I knew him, but not any more?

Even if this seems like a silly point, the text of the bill is too vague to get clear answers. Although this bill is called the Help Not Harm Act, I worry that it will do far more harm than help. It introduces a new minefield for those of us who work with children in state-run agencies and buildings to navigate. The consequence of this is pushing away youth in need in an effort to avoid punishment. This, in turn, only increases their sense of alienation, depression, and risk of making harmful decisions. I know this from personal experience as a suicidal child always in search of a safe adult.

In short, I encourage you to vote no on the passage of SB 63 to protect the well-being of children and the ability of adults to work successfully with them. Thank you all once again for allowing me to speak.

Thank you,
Isaac Johnson, LMSW