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Testimony in Opposition to SB 63 By Rev. Charles McKinzie II
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare, Sen. Beverly Gossage, Chair
January 28, 2025

Mme. Chair, Members of the Committee:

I am Ptr. Charles McKinzie. I serve as senior pastor of Grace United Methodist Church in Winfield, and I am testifying on behalf of Kansas Interfaith Action, the statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that partners with several of the primary Mainline denominations, as well as Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities and individuals throughout the state. I rise in strong opposition to SB 63.

The primary concern of the Christian community should be to attune to Jesus' words. When he was asked what was the greatest law, his reply was to love God and love neighbor - telling us that on these two ideals all other laws and commandments hang. I stand today to ask that this kind of grace be extended to transitioning youth, as they desire to present their truest selves in the world. As a pastor for gender fluid, non-binary, and trans folks, and their families and communities, my prayerful reflection is that they, like all of us, are created in the divine image of a loving God.

The diversity of human sexuality and identities reflect the glory and majesty of a God in whose image they are created and loved. Just as God created night and day, God made dusk and dawn and twilight. Throughout creation we see evidence that the simple binaries we try to impose on God's creation are too small and inadequate to categorize what actually exists. So too is it with humans. It is up to those of us who love transgender persons to support them as they develop and explore their identities - even, or I should say especially, if those explorations are unconventional or uncomfortable for the rest of us. I would also suggest that it is the job of the members of this committee and this legislature to represent their best interests, and not to fall victim to fear-mongering, hatred against a marginalized group, or poll results.

I want to add some context to what it means to be trans today. A recent paper in the National Journal of Psychological Medicine said the following about transgender people:¹

Gender-based victimization, discrimination, bullying, violence, being rejected by the family, friends, and community; harassment by intimate partner, family members, police and public; discrimination and ill treatment at health-care system are the major risk factors that influence the suicidal behavior among transgender persons. These factors all contribute to the suicide attempt rate among transgender persons ranging from 32-50% depending on location.

The UCLA School of Law recently wrote that transgender people are over FOUR times more likely than others to be the victim of a violent crime.

It is literally a life-threatening danger to be transgender. If you had any lingering doubt whether a trans person is simply "choosing a lifestyle," let that be put to bed. No one would *want* to take on an identity which puts them at great risk for violence and death. Being an out trans person is an act of bravery and courage that those of us with more conventional gender identities will simply never be able to understand.

Interfering with transgender people's ability to access care will make all of these factors worse. This legislation will stop any youth from being trans. It will, however, prevent them from receiving the health care they need, and threaten providers and professionals who want to affirm and help them.

¹ Suicide and Suicidal Behavior among Transgender Persons, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28031583/>

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Faith leaders and denominational bodies are deeply alarmed about the impact of this bill on transitioning youth and their families, and the undue stress it will create on medical providers who wish to provide their patients the best standards of care.

Kansas Interfaith Action opposes SB 63 for three main reasons:

First, and most important, *gender-affirming care is life-saving care*. Medical care for gender dysphoria is evidence-based, medically necessary, and safe—which is why every major medical association advocates *against* bills like this. SB 63 is an attack on the dignity of and right to medical access for a vulnerable group of citizens. Patients and their families should have the freedom to make their own private medical decisions—not politicians.

Second, this is a big government solution which puts this legislature's opinions directly into choices that are better left between the patient receiving care, their parents/representatives, and their medical providers. In several cases over the past couple of years this legislature has argued for greater control by parents, particularly in educational curriculum and vaccine mandates. So why doesn't this parental right also apply to the parents of trans kids, and trans kids themselves, whose faith teaches them to affirm and celebrate gender diversity beyond the binary? Yet in this case the legislature wants to prioritize its opinions - and its prejudices - above the consideration of parents, who know and love their children and want what's best for them.

Thirdly, SB 63 has a negative impact on medical providers who have chosen their profession for reasons which include enabling their patients to have full, healthy, and fulfilled lives. This bill puts a legal bullseye on the medical professionals and staff most qualified to provide support for and understand the needs of families with transgender children. It compromises the integrity of the medical community by forcing doctors to do their job as the legislature dictates—rather than using standards of care that their profession directs them to.

According to a recent survey by the Trevor Project, 39% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year — including 46% of transgender and nonbinary young people – and 12% made an attempt. 50% of LGBTQ+ young people who wanted mental health care in the past year were not able to get it, 90% of LGBTQ+ young people said their well-being was negatively impacted due to recent politics, and 45% of transgender and nonbinary young people reported that they or their family have considered moving to a different state because of LGBTQ+-related politics and laws.²

This is the nightmare of everyone who loves a trans, non-binary, or gender-nonconforming person. Transphobia has consequences, and they can be deadly. I didn't disclose this fully when I began, but I rise also on behalf of my 17-year-old, non-binary child. The deaths of trans people, particular trans youth, did not happen in a vacuum. It happened in a state where bullies have been led to believe that there will be no consequences for violence because people in power have stoked the fires of intolerance and venomous behaviors.

Legislation like this puts politicians in Topeka in the middle of the most sacred relationships: between parents and children, between patients and providers, between the child and their truest self, and between these people and God. You have no call to do this, and you have no right to do this.

The legislation is called the "help not harm" act, but it will do a lot of harm. There is no compelling reason for this legislature to force its ill-formed opinions onto medical professionals and parents in this state. I urge you to oppose SB 63. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

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² 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024>