

LOUD LIGHT CIVIC ACTION

Chloe Chaffin
Loud Light Civic Action
Opponent Testimony of HB 2311
For the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

March 12th, 2025

Chair Gossage and members of the Committee,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Chloe Chaffin, and I serve as Fellowship Manager 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-facilitated discrimination. It is with these values that Loud Light Civic Action strongly opposes HB 2311.

Concern: This Bill Does Not Put The Child's Health and Safety First

This bill would allow adoption and foster care agencies to make decisions for children in their care based on religious beliefs rather than on the best interests of the child. While every person should have the freedom to practice their own sincerely held religious beliefs, this bill opens the door to the secretary for children and families and the state to prioritize this belief system over that of the child's needs. While we recognize that section 1b aims to resolve this issue, we believe that the litigation clause in section 1c will counteract the attempted resolution. A litigation clause may impact state workers' judgment, causing them to be overly cautious to avoid lawsuits instead of putting the individual needs of the child first. This clause will also put our state workers and agencies at risk of frivolous lawsuits, which could have a terrible impact on an already under-resourced agency.

Concern: Government Facilitation of Practices that are Widely Regarded as Abusive

Section 1a states that a potential guardian for the child may not be prohibited based on their "intent to guide or instruct a child consistent with such beliefs". This broad language raises deep concerns, specifically if that guidance or instruction is something that could be harmful or abusive to the child. For example, therapy and other pseudoscientific practices that would attempt to "convert" an LGBTQ+ child to force them into heterosexuality, known as conversion therapy. While this practice is banned in such countries as Canada, Ecuador, France, Germany, Malta, Mexico, Spain, Albania, Brazil, Chile, Vietnam and Taiwan, and in 28 states such as Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Minnesota, Michigan, Maine and more - Kansas has no laws addressing this abusive practice. This bill would make it more difficult to prevent the abuse of adopted and fostered children in Kansas.

Impact: It is Hard to be LGBTQ+ in Kansas, HB 2311 Will Make it Harder

To speak about my personal experience, I care deeply about and feel deeply connected to the child welfare system. Both my mother and her mother before her are adopted. My mother has spent more than two decades running the nursery of the church in Overland Park where I was raised, where I volunteered every

Sunday and for many cycles of VBS. I formerly worked at a daycare in Stillwell, and I am now finishing up the last bit of my certification process with Douglas County CASA. I hope to become a foster parent one day when I have the space. I have worked with and known countless kids in the foster care system. The state has a clear, vested interest in ensuring every child has a roof over their head, no doubt. However, child safety is incomplete until psychological and emotional safety are considered.

And I am a former queer kid myself. I say that not because I “grew out of” my queerness, but because I feel so lucky to have made it long enough to become a living, breathing queer adult. That means something as someone who for many years didn’t think I was going to let myself get that far.

Kids need the state’s protection from all forms of neglect and abuse. Allowing them to be placed in homes with foster parents who will invalidate their queerness and seek to change and fix that which is not broken only compounds existing traumas and risks dangerous mental health crises. I was the queer kid whose mom read my texts and rushed me to the Johnson County Mental Health Center for emergency services when I was sixteen. I knew my family and faith community were safe people on this matter and yet sometimes existing as a queer person in this country and state still feels impossibly hard. I am a born and raised Kansan, and I will live and die here too. No amount of frustrating bills will ever take my home away from me, and yet, the legislature’s priority over the past few years on targeting queer kids has been exhausting.

I only very recently officially came out to my mom at age 22. I figured she knew, but it was still so hard to say. I only told her on January 28th of this year when I was crying in my car in the parking garage across the street after attending the hearings on SB 63. Because, the truth is, as much as these types of bills will do harm when passed, the constant barrage of transphobic headlines signaling that your government doesn’t believe you or love you enough to keep you safe is already doing harm right now. Every bill given a hearing is a tradeoff and an opportunity cost. It breaks my heart to see that this is what the legislature likes to spend so much of their precious few 90 days on.

As I called my mom that day, so drained by it all, I heard her voice break as she asked me where I was and if I was safe. I reassured her that this was not that kind of call, and then she gave me her favorite line, “You know it’s my job to worry,” because that is what a good, safe, loving parent does.

It is hard to be a kid. It is hard to be a person. It is hard to be queer. It is hard for kids to grow up in foster care. There is no reason we can’t choose to lead with kindness and protection instead of compounding the pain of their hardest moments. I feel so lucky to have the support I have. Please vote no and see to it that everyone else gets the same.

There are so many wonderful foster homes out there, I know we need more, but we still need to make sure that queer kids are placed in safe and accepting environments. Foster kids are already an exceptionally vulnerable population and if we want them to grow to be confident, happy, resilient adults, we need to reject this. Queer acceptance is the most basic safety planning we can offer these children.

For these reasons, Loud Light Civic Action strongly urges members of this committee to oppose HB 2311, and urges the legislature to please, do not place the belief systems of adults over the actual life of the child in their care. Thank you all for your time and I hope you take my testimony into consideration.