

## Opposition Testimony for HB 2311

For the Senate Committee on Public Health

and Welfare

March 12, 2025

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Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on HB 2311.

As you are already aware, House Bill 2311 seeks to prohibit the Department of Children and Families from denying placement of LGBTQ+ foster youth with foster families that do not accept them. Additionally, it permits unaccepting foster parents to pursue legal action against the Department for any policies that necessitate respect for the sexual orientation or gender identity of foster youth. As a professional who works with foster youth, I must emphasize the significant representation of LGBTQ+ individuals within the foster care system, a phenomenon that often contributes to their placement in care. This issue is not confined to the state of Kansas; it resonates nationally.

The adult members of the LGBTQ+ community are striving to secure their rights, and it is imperative that we, as advocates for youth within the same community, engage in this struggle on their behalf. Our efforts must persist until we reach a point where such advocacy is no longer necessary. Allowing LGBTQ+ foster youth to be placed in environments that do not accept their identities is likely to lead to increased rates of hospitalization, instances of running away, and refusals to enter placements. The already high rate of youth running away from foster care is troubling, impacting both LGBTQ+ youth and their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts.

To place these children—who are navigating their identities and often feel abandoned, unwelcome, and unloved—into the homes of individuals who may subject them to further mistreatment or hostility is a disservice to their well-being. These children are already facing significant challenges resulting from their experiences in the foster care system, and regardless of the circumstances of their placement, such an environment is inherently unsafe. The enactment of this bill could precipitate a rise in absences without leave (AWOLs), hospitalizations, and suicidal ideation among these vulnerable youth, as well as exacerbate the mistreatment they face in placements. Is this truly what we desire for children? It is my firm belief that this bill should not be enacted under any circumstances.