

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members,

My name is Tyler Geisler and my wife, Allison, and I are private Kansas citizens, appearing today in support of HB2311. In 2019 we started the process to become licensed foster parents with the vision of helping with kids ages three and under and in respite and emergency placement contexts. We were ultimately denied and believe this denial was based on our faith and views on sexual orientation and gender identity.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> of 2019, we completed our 9<sup>th</sup> of 10 MAPPS training classes, and we were supposed to have our final home visit on May 1<sup>st</sup>. In multiple discussions during class, sparked by training material, it was clear that we had differing views to the beliefs of the teachers and the training agency. However, we also were told to see the MAPPS class as a safe environment to process these thoughts and discussions.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, our teachers, and to our surprise, their supervisor came to our home for what we thought was a final paperwork exercise and home visit. It ended up that they had a planned agenda with specific questions prepared that we were not made aware of prior to their arrival. The questions and topics brought up seemed to have already been discussed internally and it became obvious they were coming at us and not trying to come along side us in areas of differences. It was clarified that these questions were unique to us and not asked of all other trainees in our class.

Of all the topics discussed, the one they focused in on most was how we would handle a homosexual or transgender child in our home. They stated that we brought up the conversation during one of the classes and the conversation got intense. They said it caused people in class to feel uncomfortable, which surprised us because afterward two separate couples thanked us for asking because they didn't know how to, but really wanted to talk through it. There were only 7 people in the class including ourselves, so at least 85% of the class was glad we spent time talking through it.

During the conversation in our home, there were at least three things we made very clear with the agency and trainers.

- 1) Regardless of whether we agreed with the homosexual or transgender lifestyle or not, this would in no way shape or form stop us from loving, caring, providing, protecting and working with the child on the case plan goals.
- 2) That while we do not believe the homosexual or transgender lifestyle is God's intended plan, this is a topic we respect the person enough to realize only they can give us the authority in their life to talk with them about, and it does not constitute that we would treat them any different.
- 3) We could not tell them exactly what we are going to do with a child who thinks this way because we had never been in that situation, but that is exactly why we were asking. We needed to know what resources and advice were available to us. We believe the context of those situations completely defines how we would interact, but all of it would be under the primary case goals and the best interest of the child. We stated our most likely reaction would be to engage a professional counsellor who is equipped to help the child in the areas they have questions about with their sexual orientation or self-identification.
  - a) We were further questioned on our response of calling a professional counselor because the agency wanted to know if that is because we were thinking something was wrong with the child, or if it was something else. We clarified it was because we had little to no experience in the topic at the time and that seeking professional help seemed like what would be in the best interest of the child.

This topic is difficult to be on opposing sides of, and no matter how hard we tried to explain that, yes, we have different beliefs than our teachers and their supervisor, we also believe this would never prohibit our ability and desire to provide great love and care to a child in need.

It was this conversation, and on that day, that the agency supervisor decided we were ultimately denied the ability to complete MAPPS training and gain our license. We were only a few days from completion.

It hurt us greatly to be told they believe we would do more harm than good when at our core is to love God and love others, and we had passed all other requirements they put in front of us. But the reality is the kid who has to sleep in an office tonight is the one getting the short straw because we, and others like us, are simply not an option. If the need is so great, we must find a way to work together even if we have fundamental differences.

Being denied the ability to care for a child based on sincerely held religious or moral beliefs should not exist and we humbly ask that HB2311 be passed for no other reason than to protect the opportunity for people of all walks and beliefs to be able to help these children. In the recent House hearing on February 17<sup>th</sup> it was made clear that this bill still allows the secretary the right to choose a family for placement that is in the best interest of the child. This bill is not forcing LGBTQ children to be placed in homes that would not be in their best interest, and it is not targeting the placement of LGBTQ youth in any way. This bill is an effort to keep the funnel for licensing families as wide as possible and guard against any single opinion bias that threatens to do otherwise like we were subjected to.

Thank you for your time and please vote to pass HB2311.