



PO Box 654
Lawrence, KS 66044
<https://kansasinterfaithaction.org>
(913) 232-2336

**Testimony by Rev. Rachael Pryor in Opposition to HB2238
House Education Committee, Rep. Adam Thomas, chair**

February 13, 2023

Mr. Chair, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony before you today. I am the Rev. Rachael Pryor, Associate Conference Minister of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference, United Church of Christ. I am also the Board Chair of Kansas Interfaith Action, a non-partisan multifaith advocacy organization. Between these two roles I speak on behalf of more than 200 different faith communities across the state of Kansas. I also speak to you as a mother of four children, who currently attend or will attend public schools in Lindsborg, Kansas; to urge you to oppose House Bill 2238.

Our churches are large and small, urban and rural, from more than a dozen different denominations, scattered across the state. We do not agree on everything, but we do agree that every single one of our children deserves a chance to grow and thrive; to learn and play in an environment where they are loved, cared for, and protected from bullying. Our churches are full of people who study and teach science, so we know this bill is based on skewed information, outdated and simplistic understandings of biological science, and is truly rooted in attempts to build political influence.

The media focus on a small number of high-level adult trans athletes has distracted too many of us from the real issue here: elementary-age kids who are being banned from playing with their friends simply because they are different. Children are born every day with organs and chromosomes representing "both" genders. Are these children not beloved of God, made in God's image? Are we asking that every single elementary school child athlete undergo extensive chromosomal and hormonal testing? Visible genitalia are merely one indicator of biological sex, and are not always definitive. Will intersex children be banned from ALL sports teams? A better approach, would be to simply trust our children and young adults to tell us who they are, and love them in all their diversity.

If you want to really protect my daughters' abilities to play sports – to give them a fair chance – there are plenty of great ways to do so. How about making sure their locker rooms are even half as nice as the boys' rooms? What about offering them the same number of teams to play on; paying their coaches equitable salaries; making sure they have the same amount of access to good equipment, weight rooms, and practice fields? All of these measures would benefit hundreds of thousands of kids across Kansas.

Banning trans children from playing sports will not improve any child's ability to play. But here's what we know it WILL do:

It creates a harmful environment of gender policing that impacts cisgender girls as well. ALL girls who have a less curvy, more "athletic" build; who have short hair or don't wear make-up, are suddenly the

recipients of suspicion about whether they are “real” girls. This happens to my oldest daughter on an almost daily basis. She’s only in fourth grade, she has short hair, and she doesn’t like dresses. When I was young, that’s how most kids dressed. 30 years later, it’s the primary source of bullying in the life of a child who is unanimously characterized as one of the kindest children in her entire school.

A trans sports ban doesn’t just affect athletes, either. LGBTQ youth are more than four times as likely as their straight, cisgender peers to attempt suicide.¹ The Minority Stress Model explains this outcome as the result of internalization of anti-LGBTQ messaging in governmental, educational, community, and religious contexts. Every piece of legislation that targets even a tiny number of trans kids in Kansas, is a way of telling ALL trans people, ALL LGBTQ people in Kansas, “Your life doesn’t matter to us. There is something unlovable about you.”

As a religious leader, let me say it plainly: this bill is a heretical and sinful attack on children’s lives. The Bible I read describes a God whose image is male AND female, never just one or the other. The redeeming Christ in whom I rest my hope for the salvation of all creation is so expansive, as St. Paul proclaims in Galatians 3:28, that for the early Christians "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In my life, I’ve run two half-marathons. I was third place in my state’s high school track championships for discus. And we can argue about whether or not it’s a sports team, but I played sousaphone in the Michigan Marching Band for three seasons, and you’ll never convince me that we aren’t athletes as well as musicians. As a woman and an athlete, I don’t need any protection from trans people. My daughters don’t need protection from trans kids – and neither do my sons. But ALL of my kids need your protection from the single leading cause of death in children: suicide. They need the adults charged with the care of our civil communities to stand up against bullies, instead of becoming bullies themselves. To let all kids know they are loved, instead of teaching them that anything about them that’s different, is a reason to wonder whether they’ll ever really belong. Whether they’ll ever be safe.

We all know the benefits of playing youth sports: staying healthy, learning how to work hard, being part of a team, even learning how to lose well, and pick yourself up, and try again. Every child in Kansas deserves a chance to play, without anyone questioning them, excluding them, or even harming them, just because they’re a little bit different from some of their peers. Please put politics aside for the sake of our children, and vote no on HB 2238.

Thank you for your time.

Rev. Rachael Pryor
Lindsborg, Kansas
rpryor@kocucc.org
(620) 504-2888

¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/>