

## Testimony in Support of HB 2300

Good afternoon.

I am the Rev. Dr. Paxton Jones. It was my privilege to serve as an ordained minister within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for more than 41 years—23 in congregational ministry and 18 on regional staff, including the last 10 as Regional Minister of the Christian Church in Kansas—prior to my retirement. For more than a dozen of those years, I also served as a volunteer police chaplain, first in Salina and later here in Topeka.

The Christian scriptures are clear that we are to protect the vulnerable among us, especially children (see Mark 9:42). We who are clergy are charged by the very nature of our calling to ministry to fulfill this obligation. Therefore I have always been astonished, as a pastor and a chaplain, that we have never been mandatory reporters of suspected abuse. As a local pastor, I was fortunate never to have had to report such suspicions within my congregation, but I also made it clear to my parishioners that I would if it were warranted. Later as Regional Minister, I counseled the clergy under my oversight that they had an ethical obligation to do the same.

The "why" is quite simple. One day I walked into a room to find a man, his wife, and a little girl I guessed to be about eight-years-old. The marks on the woman's face and neck were still red, with old bruises still visible; and their little girl sat protectively between her parents. The man's defense (I refuse to call him a father) was that "The Bible says the man is head of the household, so if I tell her to get me another beer and she refuses, I have the right to hit her." My admonitions that the Bible says more about love, compassion, grace, forgiveness, and honoring one's wife fell on deaf ears—at least his—and he kept coming back to what he thought was his biblical justification.

The physical abuse endured by that woman was self-evident; equally real to me was the emotional and psychological abuse endured by their daughter. How could anyone, but especially a member of the clergy, turn away and not report that? To have done so would have said to that woman and that little girl not just that they were unimportant, but that this is normative and to be endured. As a pastor, as a Christian, as a father, it was my duty to report that abuse.

The Church, of all places in society, should be **the** preeminent place of safety for those seeking such, especially from their abusers. It cannot be if we as clergy allow suspected abuse to go unreported.

Thank you.