

House Committee on Judiciary  
March 12, 2024  
House Bill 2300  
Testimony in Support

Chairperson Humphries and members of the Committee:

Thank you for accepting my testimony in support of HB 2300, which would include duly ordained ministers of religion and clergy as mandatory reporters of suspected abuse or neglect of children and minors.

As an ordained and authorized minister in the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ, serving Wichita United Church of Christ in Wichita, Kansas, I have an ethical and professional responsibility to report abuse and neglect of children and minors to appropriate state authorities, regardless of the legal requirements that this bill is proposing. However, many clergy, communities of faith, and religious judicatory bodies do not require the kind of mandatory reporting as proposed by HB 2300 as part of their authorization and standing requirements. This should be a requirement in order to be recognized as a duly ordained minister of religion in the State of Kansas.

This responsibility as a pastor is part of the task of leading a community of faith built on mutual trust and accountability. All people, and especially children and youth, should be able to trust that their pastor or equivalent ordained minister of religion will take their safety and threats to their wellbeing seriously. There should be no exemptions for reporting neglect or abuse of children and minors as already described in statute.

I can appreciate and agree that some limits on mandatory reporting concerning penitent privilege and confidential communication are important. However, I do not see these as valid exemptions when the abuse or neglect of children is suspected or reported. Exemptions like the one in HB 2300 can and have allowed the shielding and silencing of accountability when abuse is suspected or reported against fellow clergy colleagues. This bill would be improved with the removal of the penitent communication privilege exemption.

Nevertheless, I support HB 2300, and ask that the committee recommend this bill favorably for passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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