

Opponent House Bill 2238: Enacting the fairness in women's sport's act

Chairwoman Baumgardner and members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on the current bill and how legislation related to gender identity affects youth. My organization, the Kansas Suicide Prevention Headquarters (KSPHQ), is located in Lawrence, KS. We are a suicide prevention resource center and one of four 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline call centers operating for Kansas. We provide first line coverage for the 103 counties in Kansas and backup coverage to Johnson and Sedgwick counties. We are also the only 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline center providing text and chat support in the state.

Unfortunately the trend in Kansas is clear, suicide and suicidality are rising for all age groups. This problem is especially pronounced for our youth. A recent statistical analysis by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment showed youth age 10-18 had the highest rates of suicidal ideation, self-harm, and suicide attempt emergency department visits every year between 2016-2021, with a 34% increase due to suicide attempts, in 2021 compared to 2016¹.

Not only the data, but our experiences providing crisis counseling on the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, shows clear increases in mental health distress for youth across our state. Our best hope of countering the increase in youth mental health distress and suicide is to come together as parents, mentors, mental health service providers, and policy makers to increase protective factors in our environment. One of the protective factors in which we all have a part to play is building connection. Fostering connections between youth, youth and adults, and in our communities as a whole is what will save lives. For transgender and non-binary identifying youth in our state, the correlation between acceptance and protection against suicide is clear. We have an opportunity to send a signal to these youth that they are respected and that their safety is important to their communities.

¹ Kansas Department of Health and Environment. *Age Group Trends in Attempts and Ideation*. Suicide-Related Data | KDHE, KS. <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1974/Suicide-Related-Data>

While the intent of this bill may be to protect fairness in women's sports, I fear the unintended consequence will be to send a message to transgender and non-binary youth that their lives do not matter. Our policy decisions and the way they are carried out in local communities has real life consequences. Data from the Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health has some startling numbers to share:

- 51% of surveyed Kansas transgender and nonbinary youth seriously considered suicide in the last year.
- 23% of surveyed Kansas transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide in the last year.
- 71% of surveyed Kansas transgender and nonbinary youth reported that they have experienced discrimination based on their gender identity.
- 89% of surveyed transgender and nonbinary youth report worry about laws' negative impacts on their access to gender-affirming healthcare, sports, and access to bathrooms.

In closing, I would like to thank this committee for past support of measures which help to protect our Kansas youth from suicide. Passage of the Jason Flatt act continues to provide youth across our state with access to adults who are ready and able to identify the warning signs for suicide and get those youth to help. I encourage the committee members to not recommend HB 2238 to the full Senate chamber, and therefore, continue the tradition of standing for suicide safety in our state.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to answer any further questions members of the committee may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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