



*End discrimination based on
sexual orientation and
gender identity*

Neutral Statement of Thomas Witt
Executive Director at Equality Kansas
HB 2550 – Student Empowerment Act
House Committee on K-12 Budget

Feb 1, 2022

Greetings Chairwoman Williams and members of the committee –

Equality Kansas is the leading LGBTQ advocacy organization in our state. We have had a full time presence in the statehouse since 2006, and in that time two of our main priorities have been school bullying prevention and the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in school non discrimination, harassment, and bullying prevention policies.

For the entirety of our work here, we have remained on the sidelines of the money arguments which dominate much of the debate in this building. With that said, we are not here today to take a position on the idea of school vouchers per se, but to talk about the unintended consequences of shifting money from public education to private school systems, and the negative consequences faced by LGBT students, or students with LGBT family members.

Here's one example: In 2019, a kindergartner was expelled from a St Ann's Parish elementary school in Prairie Village. Was she expelled for fighting? No. For bringing a gun to school? No. For any infraction of the rules whatsoever? No.

The child was expelled because her moms are a legally married same sex couple.

In 2016, news reports covered a Wichita story where admissions documents (attached) for Trinity Academy, a private Christian high school, expressly bans students with LGBT family members, or family members who advocate in any way for LGBT equality.

These are just two examples of private schools punishing children not just for the so called "sins" of their parents, but for all the "sins" of their relatives and household members.

While we are neutral on the matter of education funding and spending in general, in this case, we cannot support a bill that diverts taxpayer money to contractors and organizations which then use that money to deny services to the very taxpayers funding them.

Put simply, forcing children, and every one of their family members, to pass a religious qualification test to access taxpayer funded services is offensive to us; we believe it should be offensive to you as well.

Please be mindful of the words of the constitution of our great state. Article 6, Section 6, Paragraph (c) says this:

“No religious sect or sects shall control any part of the public educational funds.”

Section 7 of the Kansas Bill of Rights says this:

“No religious test or property qualification shall be required for any office of public trust, nor for any vote at any election, nor shall any person be incompetent to testify on account of religious belief.”

Should the committee work this bill, we urge you, as strongly as possible, to require any grant or funding recipients to admit all qualified students, without imposing religious tests or qualifications. The only tests our kids should be taking in school are the ones covering math, language arts, history, and science.

Thank you for your time, attention, and your service to our state and nation. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.



STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT FOR PARENT AND STUDENT

Trinity Academy is dedicated to partnering with the Christian home to provide a Christ-centered, college-preparatory education for students committed to spiritual growth and academic excellence. In order for the partnership to succeed it is necessary that Trinity students and families understand, agree with and support the school's orthodox Christian beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices include but are not limited to the following:

- The Bible is the only inspired, inerrant and authoritative Word of God and the proper standard for all human conduct;
- The only path to salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ, who lived a sinless life, was crucified for our sins, rose on the third day, sits at the right hand of God the Father, and will return in power and glory;
- Because the Christian's body is the temple of God, students should refrain from the possession and use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, illegal drugs, the abuse of prescription drugs and any other inappropriate or illegal activity;
- Each family should be actively involved with and regularly attend a local, Bible-believing Church;
- Sex is a gift from God intended only for a man and a woman within sacred bounds of marriage. Sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage, according to Scripture, is sinful.
- Given the debate and confusion in our society about marriage and human sexuality it is vital that Trinity families agree with and support the school's traditional, Christian understanding of those issues. Therefore, when the atmosphere or conduct within a particular home is counter to the school's understanding of a biblical lifestyle, including the practice or promotion of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) lifestyle or alternative gender identity, the school should have the right, in its sole discretion, to deny the admission of an applicant or discontinue enrollment of a current student.

I affirm that I have read and agree with these beliefs and practices.

Mother's signature

Date

Father's signature

Date

Student's signature

Date