

Jeff Freund  
Testimony in Opposition to SB208  
Kansas Senate Education Committee  
Hearing date - February 23, 202, 1:30pm

Let me begin by sharing who I am – My name is Jeff Freund. I am a father. A son. A husband. A big brother. A cis male. An educator. A principal. A human. And a lifelong Kansan.

I am from Conway Springs, Ks, a rural farming community. I am the first in my family to go to college. As a multi-racial kid, I grew up “different”, but the same. My family was like everyone’s, except we weren’t. I know what it’s like to not truly belong. I have no horrific bullying experiences, just a sense of “different”.

As an educator of over two decades, I have seen our state and country “change”. I have seen our children become more tolerant, while our adults and leaders have seemed to grow more divisive. They have begun to welcome each other “as they are.”

We adults, especially we who are leaders, have the ability to make this change happen faster. When we lead with inclusivity, with empathy, compassion, understanding, and acceptance – our children respond. The bullying decreases. The name calling decreases. The hurt and pain decrease.

As a Kansas Principal with over a decade of experience, I can say this bill will hurt kids. It will force undue shame and despair on an already vulnerable group. It will increase bullying and fear. It will increase the hurt on our kids and it will create scars that we cannot see, but that will forever haunt these student athletes.

As the state that once taught our country that treating students, our school children, as separate, but equal was wrong, we have the chance to now reinforce that loudly and clearly. As leaders, we must continue to be the state that puts our children’s needs first, even if that decision is hard. Their emotional well being, their safety, their futures will be impacted by this bill. In the face of fear, we must be, as we have been before, inclusive leaders, not divisive ones.

A separate but equal league for our transgendered youth is wrong. Forcing students into locker rooms to face ridicule is wrong.

Our students, MY STUDENTS, are looking to me and to you, to US, as leaders. In my 22 years as an educator, one who is Nationally Board Certified, whose schools have been recognized by the Wichita Business Journal 3x as Leaders in Diversity and Inclusion, I can confidently and unequivocally say that – our children are watching us and what we do. Our words and our actions matter. Below are some recent messages from students, who, as a

result of the pandemic and remote learning, have become quite adept at writing emails and communicating and advocating for themselves.

If the simple process of changing a student's preferred name makes them feel so heard, seen, and cared about, then I can only imagine how it will make them feel to simply say – Let. Them. Play.

**An email from a non-binary student -**

HI HELLO SIR I'M SO SORRY IF I'M BOTHERING YOU BUT I JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR THE NAME CHANGE IN TEAMS IT MEANS SO MUCH TO ME!!! Ms. Callard was the one to inform me of it and she told me to thank you since you played a huge helping hand so here I am! I'm so grateful and words can't express me fully. Once again, thank you thank you thank you!!!!!!!

**An email from a non-binary student -**

Thank you so much for changing my name I am so happy right now. I hope you have a great rest of your day and weekend! 😊

**An email I wrote to a student after I inadvertently used their “dead” name -**

D,

I wanted to apologize for my mistake on the announcements today when I used your incorrect name. It was not on purpose and I have updated my list and the posted social media and updated the posters.

Sorry for the mistake and I promise to do a better job.

Have a great day and thank your teachers who had your back and let me know ASAP.

**An email from a teacher -**

**\*THIS\*** is why you are the GLSEN Educator of the Year. Thank you so much for your kindness. Not kidding. As a fellow parent of a kid in the LGBTQ community (of a child who was NOT always treated with such kindness when he was here at Robinson), please know how much I appreciate this.

**From a student -**

Hey Mr. Freund, you probably don't know me but thank you! My username had been my last name before it changed 5 years ago. Thank you for getting it changed, it means a lot to me. 😊

**From a former teacher -**

Your work with making Mayberry a more inclusive school has enabled our students to feel accepted and free to be themselves and that has definitely helped all our students in ways we are still seeing daily and will for years to come. Thank you!