

Keaton Vaughn
Testimony in Opposition to SB208
Kansas Senate Education Committee
Hearing – 2/23/2021, 1:30pm

Members of the Committee on Education,

I am writing to you today providing testimony in opposition of SB 208. My name is Keaton Vaughn and I am a homeowner in Overland Park, Kansas. I identify as non-binary and transgender and my pronouns are they/them/theirs. I grew up in Overland Park and attended school in the Blue Valley school district. I went to Heartland Elementary, Harmony Middle, and Blue Valley Northwest. I now hold a Master of Business Administration from Pittsburg State University.

I played sports throughout elementary and middle school and I know how impactful they can be on a young person's life. Sports help us connect with our peers, stay physically fit, and work together to achieve a common goal. If someone had told me that I was barred from participating in sports with the peer group that aligns with my gender identity I would have been devastated. SB 208 is overtly discriminatory and exclusionary and if passed it will harm Kansas.

Legislation that will impact Kansans should arise from a need that is voiced by Kansans. The language in this bill is strikingly similar to language in bills that have been proposed in other states such as Idaho, Montana, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arizona. This fact points to a coordinated effort by a centralized group pushing its hateful agenda across state lines. I am an actual Kansan who grew up here, played sports here, and now pays taxes here. I am telling you that this bill will damage Kansas.

I would like to address some upsetting statistics. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24 (Trevor Project). On top of that, one in three transgender youth has reported attempting suicide (Trevor Project). Many transgender young people experience rejection, bullying, and harassment (Human Rights Campaign). We should be passing inclusive legislation to protect marginalized groups such as the transgender community, not attacking some of the most vulnerable Kansans. There is a correlation between passing discriminatory legislation and an increase in suicide and violence rates. If you pass SB 208 you will be conveying to our transgender children and neighbors that their lives are not valued and that they do not belong here in Kansas.

For the business-minded, I want to emphasize that this discriminatory legislation tells transgender people and their allies that they are not welcome in Kansas and that they should spend their hard-earned paychecks elsewhere. Additionally, this legislation will deter businesses that want to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment from operating in Kansas. 91% of Fortune 500 companies prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and 83% prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and expression (Human Rights Campaign). If you pass this legislation, businesses will avoid moving to Kansas and citizens will spend their money somewhere else.

I strongly urge the committee to reject SB 208. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Keaton Vaughn
They/them/theirs
Overland Park, KS