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Opponent Testimony of SB 180, "Establishing the women's bill of rights to provide a meaning of biological sex for purposes of statutory construction."

Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

My name is Suzanne Wheeler, I am a diehard Kansan whose mother's family were original old settlers and long-time business owners in Olathe. I am a business executive, chamber leader, spouse, mother of four successful children, grandma, and retired Army Colonel, who happened to be the full-time Director of Operations for the Kansas National Guard when I retired.

I am here to ask you to oppose SB 180 and share my disappointment that supporters of this bill are bent on putting their biases ahead of the well-being of our state.

As the Executive Director of the Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce, I represent 487 business members, some of whom are the largest employers in Kansas and others representing growing industries like biotechnology and information technology. We have over 2000 active representatives of those businesses, and our members represent a workforce of more than 247,000 Kansas workers.

We oppose this blatant attack on transgender women in our state shrouded in the guise of protecting women. A quick internet search of "women attacked by transgendered people" results in no stories about reported attacks in our state by a transgender woman against a cis-gendered woman in a public or private accommodation. Instead, the search is met with a litany of stories about the fact that one in two transgender women will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime, and transgender women and non-binary individuals suffer from an epidemic of violence against them driven by myths, misinformation, and bills like SB 180.

Our members challenge you to research and work on bills that will actually protect Kansas women from the significant rates of violence they experience domestically and at work rather than bills about made-up dangers in bathrooms that do nothing to protect women.

The political theater by the supporters of this bill bent on legally erasing transgender and nonbinary citizens not only harm fellow citizens, its harms our state's economy.

Workforce development will determine if Kansas is an economic leader or a backwater. Bills like SB 180 tell the LGBTQ+ community, families, and friends that they are not welcome in Kansas. Gallop released a poll last year that cites that 7.1% of the next-generation workforce identify as LGBTQ+. That same poll indicates that over 71% of their generation make choices based on LGBTQ+ rights. The personal biases and short-sightedness of those who support this bill and others like it are chasing the next generation workforce away from our state. I often hear universities and business leaders lament because LGBTQ+ graduates from our high schools, certificate programs, and universities flee our state yearly.

I will provide a personal example, three of my children are graduates of Kansas universities. Kansas taxpayers significantly supported their education with state scholarships. Two graduated as chemical engineers, and one Magna Cum Laude. Both took jobs out of state and say they will never return to live or work in Kansas because of the way our legislature treats LGBTQ+ family members and friends.

A military and business axiom I learned early on and often share with others is. "don't make rules you can't enforce." SB 180 is nearly a duplicate copy of bills navigating at least three other state legislatures. I posit that the sponsors of this bill didn't put much thought into its crafting and placed a rubber stamp on a bill crafted by special interest groups.

Let's take me, for example. I am tall, and I have a baritone voice. I was born in Illinois, which allows changes to an original birth certificate, and the federal government allows changes to social security and a passport based on a therapist's letter. I have heard stories of the Army changing DD214s, graduation certificates, and retirement certificates to match an individual's new legal name. My Kansas driver's license and marriage certificate say female. How can you be sure that the data set reported for me is "correct" without an invasive or exhausting inquiry into my having or lack of ovaries? My oldest daughter, who lives in Kansas and is an Army Captain, is very similar to me physically. If this bill passes, will you subject her to an ovary inquisition if someone believes she's transgender in a "female" space?

The Mid-America LGBT Chamber of Commerce and I encourage the members of this committee to set aside personal bias and do what is right for Kansas, our economy, and our citizens. Focus your efforts on combating the actual sources of violence against women and on creating inclusive laws that welcome the workforce that our businesses desperately need, Please vote no SB 180.