

Hello,

I'm David Gomez, a citizen of Lenexa who is also a playwright, poet, and radio producer. I work as an arts educator who has focused on telling the stories of queer youth. I also have seen first hand the effects of bullying in schools when I grew up in the Shawnee Mission District.

I am writing to speak up against HB 208.

It puts an undue burden on students and their families when they try to participate in activities that should be widely available and empowering. These athletic activities should build a sense of community, not create unnecessary and intrusive conflicts within a community.

As a kid, I realized that bullying doesn't just come from insecure playground bullies. It comes from teachers, leaders, and even bills that are reviewed by elected Senators.

The messaging and the influence that you all have as leaders in our community directly affects what's said at the dinner table, the local news, and even the high school locker room.

I remember viscerally watching the Westboro Baptist Church protest a high school musical of Shawnee Mission East in 2009 because the theatre program presented a show which depicted a trans character with dignity, humor, and heart. That was a threat to the Westboro Baptist Church.

They actually came to my high school, Shawnee Mission West, and passed out fliers that said: "God Hates The Fag Infested School of Shawnee Mission East."

I remember my peers laughing at the language instead of being horrified. I also remember the silence of my teachers and our principal.

The silence of the school district and the reluctance of our leaders at the time to speak out against this, allowed this hate group's slur to infect the halls like a virus.

This may seem like an extreme example, but it's my truth.

Their message of hate has shamed Kansas in the national spotlight for many years. If you pass this bill, you are sending a message to students that the way hateful groups see trans students as less than human and "hated by God", is similar to the way this committee imagines trans students to be: a problem that needs to be discussed and litigated.

I could cite countless statistics about trans students being the most vulnerable to suicide risk. But instead, I'm asking you to consider how this bill sends the wrong message to straight, cis-gendered students.

If their coaches, school administrators, and personal doctors are required to obsess and document the biological gender identity of queer and trans students, their peers might feel that their bullying, ignorance, and fear is justified.

I urge you to vote against this.

Thank you for your consideration,
David Gomez