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Written Testimony of Rev. Jonalu Johnstone, Manhattan, KS in Opposition to SB 208

Senate Education Committee, Molly Baumgardner, Chair

I am Jonalu Johnstone, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Manhattan, writing to you in opposition to SB 208. Throughout my decades in ministry, I have served congregations that have welcomed transgender people into the pews. So, I have ministered to the people who would be affected by the proposed bill.

What makes someone male or female? We think these are clear-cut distinctions. However, people have always been more complex than that. The “inherent differences” the bill describes are not so clear as some might wish. There are women who are taller and more muscular than most men. There are men who are nurturers rather than aggressors. Sex chromosomes come in many more combinations than XX and XY. The most common variation XXY occurs in 1 of every 650 births.¹ Hormone levels also vary within sexes. Builds are different. Would we suggest Michael Phelps be disqualified from swimming because his body type is too perfect for the sport, and that, therefore, his competition is unfair? Most importantly, intersex and transgender people are real, and need to be accommodated and treated fairly.

The suggestion that a student-athlete needs to be inspected to determine their sex will create humiliation and resentment, not only for transgender and intersex athletes, but also for anyone who may not appear to match the expectations of their gender — the girl who is too tall with an undeveloped bust, for example. She may be, and probably will be, challenged. Such girls have long been called names and had their gender mocked by peers. They may shy away from sports because of having to prove their femininity. Changing bodies of adolescents are embarrassing enough. Teasing and mockery among students is all too real. Adults need not compound that with unfortunate expectations of meeting gender standards.

The real point of this bill is to cement stereotypes of what a man is and what a woman is, to enforce boundaries between genders that need not exist, and which ultimately, work against all of us, pushing us to pretend that we are not our full selves — whatever gender or sex that may be. We are all made in the image of God — men, women, transgender people and intersex people. Can we treat all people with the same respect and care that we would wish for ourselves? Can we allow our children and youth to become their full selves instead of hiding and pretending? This bill supports the teasers and the mockers, not the children and youth legitimately trying to grow into their full selves.

I oppose SB 208 and urge you to vote against it.

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¹ <https://thefocusfoundation.org/x-y-chromosomal-variations/>

