

Testimony in Opposition to SB208  
Kendall Hawkins, Policy Coordinator, GLSEN Kansas  
Kansas Senate Education Committee  
February 20th, 2021

I've lived in Kansas my entire life and I've been proud to call it my home for nearly 33 years. My name is Kendall Hawkins. I volunteer as the Policy Coordinator for GLSEN Kansas. I'm also a parent of a 2nd grader, I'm a special education teacher, head coach of a middle school cross country team, and a veteran of the Kansas Army National Guard.

Fostering a welcoming school climate is one of the most important tasks for educators to ensure a positive learning environment for every child. Unfortunately for many Kansas LGBTQ students, schools are not as safe or inclusive as they should be. The recently released [2019 Kansas Snapshot](#) of the biennial [GLSEN National School Climate Survey](#) (NSCS) provides us with concrete evidence derived from the lived experiences of LGBTQ students across our state. In my nine years as an educator and in training other educators on these issues, this particular statistic about Kansas LGBTQ student experiences comes as a shock to many of my colleagues and former educators alike: **18% of Kansas LGBTQ students reported regularly hearing school staff make homophobic remarks and 37% heard school staff make negative remarks about someone's gender expression .**

Three legislators who were former educators are sponsors of these anti-transgender bills that would directly harm Kansas transgender youth. Some educators have a hard time believing that previous statistic because they don't want to believe their peers could even unintentionally harm children, much less explicitly. As these three former educators try to set these policies for the entire state, let them be proof of the school climates the students endure as well.

All educators learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the psychological effects of students not experiencing a sense of safety and belonging at school. This legislation ignores this foundational concept of education. If we want ALL students to feel safe enough to be able to grow and prosper in our schools, then we need policies that protect them and support all their needs, not proposals that will harm them by excluding them from opportunities that create more positive academic, social, emotional, and psychological outcomes for them.

Legislation such as this bill escalates hostilities towards transgender individuals in our schools and communities and amplifies the negative effects they already experience. According to a recent survey conducted by The Trevor Project titled 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, **52% of transgender and non-binary students reported having seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months**<sup>1</sup>. The study also found that **“over 90% of LGBTQ**

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<sup>1</sup> The Trevor Project condemns the passage of Anti-transgender Sports bill By Montana House Committee. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2021, from

**youth said that recent politics negatively influenced their well-being.** And a peer-reviewed study by Trevor’s researchers found that transgender and nonbinary youth who reported experiencing discrimination based on their gender identity had **more than double the odds of attempting suicide in the past year** compared to transgender and nonbinary youth who did not experience gender identity-based discrimination.” Furthermore, a recent study conducted by researchers at Wichita State University showed that **state-level policies supporting LGBTQ equality are associated with a reduced risk of suicide among LGBQ youth**<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, you as legislators wield power that greatly influences the issues these kids face. Enacting this bill would misemploy that power.

It is widely known that participation in athletic activities is beneficial to all students. When students have access to these opportunities the resulting positive outcomes include improved social skills<sup>3</sup>, physical health<sup>4</sup>, and overall mental health. More specifically, students participating in sports have demonstrated improvements in emotional intelligence and regulation<sup>5</sup>, greater self esteem<sup>6</sup>, fewer symptoms of depression<sup>7</sup>, and a significant decrease in suicidality<sup>8</sup>. **Transgender students deserve access to these opportunities in ways that affirm**

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[https://www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr\\_press/the-trevor-project-condemns-the-passage-of-anti-transgender-sports-bill-by-montana-house-committee/](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_press/the-trevor-project-condemns-the-passage-of-anti-transgender-sports-bill-by-montana-house-committee/)

<sup>2</sup> Pearson, J., Wilkinson, L. and Wooley-Snyder, J.L. (2021), "State-level Policy, School Victimization, and Suicide Risk among Sexual Minority Youth", LeBlanc, A.J. and Perry, B.L. (Ed.) *Sexual and Gender Minority Health (Advances in Medical Sociology, Vol. 21)*, Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 65-101.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey, R. (2006). Physical education and sport in schools: A Review of benefits and outcomes. *Journal of School Health*, 76(8), 397-401; Eime, R. M., Young, J. A., Harvey, J. T., Charity, M. J., & Payne, W. R. (2013). A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: Informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 10(98).

<sup>4</sup> Biddle, S. J. H, & Asare, M. (2011). Physical activity and mental health in children and adolescents: A review of reviews. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 45(11), 886-895; Snyder, A., Martinez, J., Bay, R., Parsons, J., Sauers, E., & McLeod, T. (2010). Health-related quality of life differs between adolescent athletes and adolescents nonathletes. *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation*, 19, 237-248.

<sup>5</sup> Eime, R. M., et al (2013); Hansen, D. M., Larson, R. W., & Dworkin, J. B. (2003). What adolescents learn in organized youth activities: A survey of self-reported developmental experiences. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 13(1), 25-55.

<sup>6</sup> Adachi, P. J. C., & Willoughby, T. (2014). It’s not how much you play, but how much you enjoy the game: The longitudinal associations between adolescents’ self-esteem and the frequency versus enjoyment of involvement in sports. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(1), 137-145; Bailey, R. (2006); Eime, R. M., et al (2013); Slutzky, C. B., & Simpkins, S. D. (2009). The link between children’s sport participation and self-esteem: Exploring the mediating role of sport self-concept. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(3), 381-389.

<sup>7</sup> Boone, E., & Leadbeater, B. (2006). Game on: Diminishing risks for depressive symptoms in early adolescence through positive involvement in team sports. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16(1), 79-90; Eime, R. M., et al (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Taliaferro, L. A., Rienzo, B. A., Pigg, R. M., Miller, M. D., & Dodd, V. J. (2009). Associations between physical activity and reduced rates of hopelessness, depression, and suicidal behavior among college students. *Journal of American College Health*, 57(4), 427-436; Taliaferro, L. A., Eisenberg, M. E., Johnson, K. E., Nelson, T. F., Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2011). Sport participation during adolescence and suicide ideation and attempts. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 23 (1), 3-10.

**their identities as much as anyone else.** The vast majority of mental healthcare providers and medical providers support these assertions as well.

The positive academic outcomes related to transgender student participation in athletics on teams consistent with their gender identity also must not be ignored. GLSEN found in its research that “on a 4.0 scale, LGBTQ+ student athletes have a GPA that is 0.2 points higher than students who did not participate in athletics. LGBTQ+ team leaders have a GPA that is 0.4 points higher than their peers who did not participate in athletics. Further, 56% of LGBTQ+ team members and 66% of LGBTQ+ team leaders competing in high school sports report feeling a positive sense of belonging at school<sup>9</sup>.” The bill in question today would deprive transgender students of these positive benefits while simultaneously damaging their sense of belonging within our public schools.

As I’ve mentioned before, in addition to my secondary position as a coach, my primary role as an educator is in the field of special education. When I am reevaluating or initiating an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a student, one of the things I must do is to identify the potential harmful effects of implementation of the IEP. This same process should be applied by our elected leaders when proposing new laws. Throughout my testimony I’ve described many of the potential and actively occurring harmful effects of policies such as those contained in this legislation. When taking into consideration that the concerns raised by supporters and sponsors of this bill are purely speculative and have not arisen in Kansas under current KSHSAA guidelines regarding transgender student participation in athletics, the undeniable harmful effects on transgender students greatly outweigh the hypothetical “benefits” claimed by those advancing this proposed legislation.

These numbers represent living, breathing students I’ve had on my cross country team, in my classroom, and that are in schools across our state. They are intelligent, compassionate, magnificent young people who are no less worthy of dignity, respect, and opportunity than any other student. They are all of these things, but they are also vulnerable. Legislation like this further stigmatizes these kids within our communities and exacerbates their vulnerability to an even greater extent. Transgender students see their elected leaders using misinformed generalizations and imagined scenarios as justification for excluding them from being members of a team consistent with their deepest sense of self, and the implications being made that they are a threat in some way to other students is not lost on them. They see these legislators claiming to “protect ” other students from them, and with a sense of anguish they ask themselves “Who will protect me?”. By voting to oppose this legislation, each of you can answer this question for them. Seize this opportunity. Tell them, “I will.”

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<sup>9</sup> MAP, GLSEN, NCTE, and NEA (2017). Transgender Youth in America’s Schools. Available at [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Separation\\_and\\_Stigma\\_2017.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Separation_and_Stigma_2017.pdf)