



*End discrimination based on
sexual orientation and
gender identity*

Statement of Thomas Witt

Executive Director at Equality Kansas

On the subject of the 2022 Kansas redistricting process

August 11, 2021

Greetings legislators and fellow Kansans –

Equality Kansas is the leading LGBTQ advocacy organization. We have had an active presence in the Kansas statehouse since 2005, and have taken positions in legislative and congressional elections beginning with the 2006 election cycle.

In that time, we have supported the campaigns of at least fifteen openly-LGBTQ legislative and congressional candidates. We were unsuccessful every election cycle until finally, in 2018, three members of the LGBTQ community won election to the Kansas House of Representatives and the US Congress. In 2020, all three – US Representative Sharice Davids and state representatives Susan Ruiz and Brandon Woodard – won reelection.

None of those three 2018 victories were easy. Two candidates unseated long term incumbents, while the third won an open seat that, just a few years earlier, had been held by one of the most virulently anti LGBT legislators in Kansas. These were all hard fought races in which the outcomes were not foregone conclusions. That they went on to win reelection last year is a remarkable testament to their job performance as public officials and their relationships with their constituents.

Last year, amid heightened national controversy over the role of transgender Americans in our society, Wichitans elected Stephanie Byers to an open seat in the Kansas House of Representatives. Representative Byers is now one of only eight transgender legislators currently serving across the United States. For perspective, there are 7,383 state legislative districts in our fifty states.

Representation matters. Throughout our nation's history, minority and marginalized populations have struggled to claim their places at the tables of governance. Through their participation, they have helped pave the way for those they represent to more fully integrate into American society and to share in the American dream.

Like other minority populations, the LGBTQ community has faced acts of vandalism, violence and even murder as we have sought our own place at that table. From Harvey Milk's legendary win in 1977 to his assassination barely a year later, to a 2010 campaign here in Wichita marred by death threats and vehicle arson, the fight for LGBTQ representation has been long and difficult.

As you perform your Constitutional duty and redraw district boundaries, we ask that you be mindful of the Kansas LGBTQ community and the immense effort it has required to claim our seat at the table of self governance. The current LGBTQ legislators did not choose their voters. Two defeated long term incumbents. One earned a seat never before held by a member of his party. The fourth won in an environment where her

very existence is cause for controversy. All won because the voters in their districts chose them – they did not choose their voters.

It is within your power to redraw districts fairly. It is also within your power to cancel the small gains we have made – to once again relegate your LGBTQ neighbors, friends, and family members to the margins of our government. Please use that power wisely, honor the will of the voters, and avoid turning the districts your LGBTQ colleagues serve into partisan political warzones.

Thank you for your time, attention, and your service to our state and nation.