



The Center of Wichita

800 N. Market St.
Wichita, KS 67214

Statement of Thomas Witt
Board Member, The Center of Wichita
In Support of HB 2360
House Committee on Children and Seniors
February 20, 2019

Greetings Madame Chair and members of the committee –

Many you know me as the lobbyist for Equality Kansas. Today, however, I appear before you as a board member and volunteer at The Center of Wichita, our local LGBT community center.

We opened The Center – a 501(c)(3) non-profit - in 2010 to provide a central, safe space for Wichita-area LGBT groups to meet and hold community events. We also operate a number of programs to benefit our community, one of which is a weekly LGBT youth peer support group.

Depending on the time of year, we have anywhere from five to 30 kids at our weekly group. Many of them are in crisis – they've been rejected by their families or bullied at school; some have had problems with substance and alcohol abuse. They are among the most vulnerable and fragile teens in the community.

We always have at least four adult mentors present at weekly meetings, and have security personnel outside the building. We take the safety, security, and well-being of these kids very seriously. We have served hundreds of teens over the years and are proud of the positive impact we have had on many of their lives.

One of the precautions we take is a requirement that all Center board members, and all volunteers who work with the kids, must agree to submit to a background check. We use a private service to perform the checks but have often had concerns the process is not as thorough as it could be.

When HB 2360 was introduced last week, it prompted an emergency Center board conference call to decide whether to take a position in support of the bill. Our board was enthusiastic in agreement.

The Center of Wichita lives on contributions from the community; we have a small budget, but a large responsibility to the teens we serve. Having the opportunity to run background checks through the KBI and FBI will give us confidence in the end result. We would even be happy to pay a reasonable fee for the service.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to support this bill. Thank you for your time and attention. I am available to stand for questions.