

2.28.18 HB 2739 Philgreen

Dear Honorable Representatives of the Kansas House,

I am here today to strongly ask that you not strike the sections of House Bill 2739 that would require a minor who is convicted of a sex crime to register as a sex offender for life. By striking these sections, we will strip the ability of a minor to receive a fresh start. Please do not condemn a juvenile who makes a mistake to be labeled as a sex offender for the rest of their life.

I have been working with students for 32 years at Youthfront, a non-profit youth organization based in Kansas City for 75 years. As the Child Protection Coordinator for our organization for the past 25 years, I have been exposed to hundreds of difficult issues with minors. I have had to deal with many kinds of abuse, both by adults on children, as well as abuse between children. Over the years I have worked with thousands of kids from all walks of life in our camping programs. I am on the front lines of this issue.

In our sexualized culture where exposure to hard-core pornography is just a click away, many children are simply repeating what they have seen as normal. Additionally, parents are extremely protective and quick to accuse and/or press formal charges. I have personally worked with several students who were just experimenting with their growing body and exploring it by touching another student. Though sometimes innocently wrong, they were accused of a criminal act by a parent who panicked and filed a police report. I have personally been involved in cases where a juvenile is convicted, or plead out, to the crime. In these cases, there is still hope because even though the minor was convicted, the juvenile will get a new start when they turn 18. This bill eliminates that fresh start.

Are there juveniles that are sexual predators or are sexually deviant? Yes. They need professional psychological help required by statute. But striking this provision to require all juvenile offenders to register for life will not fix this problem.

For those of us who voluntarily make hot-line calls and deal with distraught parents on both sides of illicit sexual contact between minors, please give us what we need which is professional help for students who have not learned how to handle themselves sexually. I have personally worked with students whose lives were changed through positive experiences and went on to be healthy productive adults in society after a mistake they made as a minor. If they are labeled as a sex offender for life, no matter the heart change, they will be condemned.

I strongly ask that you require students to get professional help instead of condemning them to a life on the sex offender's registry.

Please do not strike these provisions in HB 2739.

Sincerely,

Topher Philgreen
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