



*End discrimination based on
sexual orientation and
gender identity*

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Equality Kansas condemns bill allowing health care workers to deny care based on religious refusal
SB 475 allows care refusals across the entire Kansas health care industry

Topeka, Kans – Equality Kansas today condemned SB 475, a recently introduced bill that, if enacted, would allow health care workers to refuse to treat patients based on “sincerely held” religious beliefs.

SB 475 was introduced February 26, and is nearly identical to an amendment adopted by the Senate Public Health committee to SB 252, the Senate’s Medicaid expansion bill. As written, any healthcare provider in Kansas would have the right to “not participate in any healthcare service” that would “violate” their “conscience.” SB 252, as amended, failed to advance before the mid-session deadline, but SB 475 is exempt from legislative deadlines.

“The idea behind this bill – that medical professionals may refuse treatment to their Kansas patients based on their religious beliefs – is vile,” Thomas Witt, Equality Kansas executive director said. “The bill refers to this as ‘conscientious objection,’ which is a complete perversion of the phrase,” Witt said. “Conscientious objectors are those who refuse to take up arms in war and kill other people. Letting people die without medical treatment is the exact opposite of that concept.”

SB 475 defines “conscience” as “deeply held religious, moral, ethical or philosophical beliefs.” Nearly identical language has been used in past bills targeting LGBT Kansans for discrimination.

“Despite the backers’ denials, we’ve seen this language used before, such as in 2018’s adoption discrimination bill,” Witt said. “We’ve seen it in 2016’s university group participation denial bill, and religious refusal bills from 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. Proponents of this type of legislation have admitted, in written and oral testimony before legislative committees, that the targets of these bills are LGBT Kansans.”

Various religious refusal bills targeting LGBT Americans have been introduced and enacted in legislatures around the United States over the past decade. In over half the states, it remains legal to deny employment, housing, and public accommodations based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Bills adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the Kansas Act Against Discrimination are stalled in the House and the Senate.

“It’s past time to end discrimination against LGBT Kansans. Legislative leadership should kill SB 475, and advance bills protecting LGBT Kansans from the scourge of discrimination,” Witt said.

Equality Kansas is the state’s leading LGBTQ advocacy organization, with chapters across the state.

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