

Statement on SB 180

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In April, the Kansas legislature enacted SB 180, the so-called “Women’s Bill of Rights,” overriding the governor’s veto. This law defines gender in the state of Kansas on the basis of sex assigned at birth, based in narrow terms on reproductive characteristics. Further, this law uses that definition to bar transgender and non-binary people from sex-segregated spaces, including restrooms, athletic facilities, and rape crisis centers, among others.

The president of the Kansas Senate, who ushered through this dangerous legislation, told the *Topeka Capital-Journal* that transgender people should not have to worry too much about enforcement, as long as they are “discreet about it.” Not only does this law force transgender and nonbinary individuals into the closet and limit their participation in full social life, that reckless statement seems to encourage people to engage in behavior that the legislature has now deemed illegal.

This law will have very real and important implications for this campus and our students, faculty, and staff. The LGBTQ+ Task Force at WSU has been pressing the university for years to create more gender-neutral, gender-inclusive, and single-use facilities on this campus, especially in academic buildings, but they have mostly faced obstruction from Facilities.

To use, as just one example, Lindquist Hall: If you are a student in a class in Lindquist, and you need access to a single-use bathroom, the closest one available is in Ablah Library. And so, just to use the restroom during class, it could mean having to take a trip of 20 minutes or more; that’s time that isn’t being spent in the classroom. In this way, this law isn’t just harmful to our transgender and non-binary students and colleagues. It interferes with our ability as faculty to do our job of teaching students while ensuring that they have the opportunity to learn in a safe and equitable environment. It thereby poses major obstacles to fulfilling the university’s inclusivity mission.

Importantly, this is just one impact of this law. I haven’t even touched on name changes, student records, Title IX, or the many other issues that are going to arise here as a result of this law. It is worth noting that among the youngest generation, 5% identify as transgender or nonbinary, so we are talking about a sizeable population of students on campus.

This is an issue of the utmost importance for the faculty. The law goes into effect on July 1, which means it will be active when our students return from summer break. I strongly recommend that the administration immediately devise a plan to address the myriad issues, including building infrastructure, that will emerge from this. I further recommend that the Faculty Senate place a discussion of this issue on the agenda of its first meeting of the fall semester, and that a representative from the LGBTQ+ Task Force be invited to be present during that meeting. I will be sending that request in writing directly to the Executive Committee, once the new Executive Committee is in place, and if there are four other Senators who would be willing to join me in that request, we can force that item to be placed on the agenda.

Thank you.