

Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight

January 27, 2020

To the Chairperson and Committee Members,

I come to you today with serious concern for Kansas youth, especially ones whom are wards of the state. I sincerely believe I can help shed first had account of your task today because I have fought very hard to become who I am today. Those odds are an accepted 3% as a throwaway teen in 1983.

I was first placed in states custody after being told to never come back by my father at age 13. I have depended on myself largely during the time from 1983-1988 because nearly every placement the state placed me into was exactly the opposite environment of what a child, whose parents do not want them, should be. The perception of being a commodity for someone to justify a job only serves to culture further resentment. I know that sounds harsh, I have no doubt there are some wonderful people working as social workers, but without the ability to provide first had support after they receive a tragic answer to their questions of concern, they stop asking. Once kids become a headcount many will not stick around to be socially irrelevant again. I know this because I have personally WALKED from Elm Acres in Pittsburg to Coffeerville KS, in hopes of making it back to Lawrence, just to escape the isolation of an uncaring staff. I have been a migrant worker, I have lived in hay trailers, tents and boxes. I was placed in the Kansas State Hospital, Stormont Vail Hospital, Memorial Hospital, Shawnee County Youth Center, all with ZERO criminal activity, each after running away from an un-nurturing group home. Detaining, even for a minute only compounded the anger. The only time I EVER felt wanted was when I was first placed in the Topeka Emergency Shelter, now closed, and a social worker that sadly left due to lack of administrative support. Children are not a problem to detain; they are a resource to help fix the shortcomings of an overburdened and inadequate social service.

Bottom line is, I strongly oppose any detention without serious criminal reason. If we are to reach these troubled teens we must develop a system that empowers them. We must be willing to ask "What brought you here and how can we help you?" Once we get the answer we must have the mechanism to be able to act on their feedback. Then and only then will they have a sence of belonging and stop running away. Failure to do so will only serve to anger a calloused, abused teens, resulting on them taking their anger out on society in their future. Please take the first step in long lasting criminal justice reform by reducing future criminals.

Thank you for your time.

I am happy to stand for in-depth questions

Respectfully,

George Hanna

Secretary, Kansas Democratic Party