

Autumn Johnson
February 23, 2021
HB 2271
Proponent Testimony
Committee on Children and Seniors

Dear Madame Chair and members of the committee,

I'm writing to you today as a proponent of HB 2271. When Rep. Thomas brought this issue to my attention last session, I was eager to begin drafting the language that would assist in the formulation of this bill.

After I became a volunteer for the Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem (CASA/GAL) Association for Children, I started noticing some disturbing trends; aging out of the foster care system being one of the most concerning. The first few years of young adulthood are critical developmental stages in life, and the unfortunate reality for many kids in foster care is that *every* developmental stage in their lives have been disrupted in some way. Adverse childhood experiences are a detrimental crisis that often has lifelong and intergenerational consequences. With lack of opportunity, support, guidance, and foundation for the future, it's impossible to see a way out.

As policy makers, it's important to acknowledge the fiscal impact of the policies we propose. While considering this impact, I urge you to also consider the costs of government assistance, incarceration, and lost productivity as a result of foster youth aging out of the system at such a critical age. This cycle of unfulfilled potential ultimately creates a higher fiscal impact and reduces the likelihood of contribution to our state's economy.

As a life-long Kansan and an advocate for these kids, I have an obligation to provide a voice for those who feel voiceless. As legislators, I ask that you look back and remember why you ran for office and began a career in public service in the first place. Whatever your central prerogatives, the core essence of this career is to provide a voice for those we serve. By helping our states most vulnerable citizens, we can build a brighter future for generations to come.

HB 2271 is a vital piece of legislation that will fundamentally help young people who have been disadvantaged through no fault of their own, and ultimately change the trajectory of their entire lives.

I want to thank Representative Thomas for the time he spent working on this bill, Mayor Ellis for his advocacy of children in need, as well as helping us identify this issue, DCF, and everyone else involved in this process.

Please support HB 2271.

Thank you Chair Concannon and members of the committee for your time and consideration.