

Testimony in Support of HB 2429
House Health and Human Services Committee
March 7, 2023

Chairwoman Landwehr and Members of the Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 2429.

My name is Heather Roberts and I am the manager of the adoption and pregnancy-counseling program with Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas. My office is in Overland Park, Kansas but we serve women in 21 counties in the northeast part of the state. This includes Johnson, Wyandotte, Leavenworth, and Douglas Counties. Over half of our clients are residents of Wyandotte.

The services that we provide in our program include

- Assist with scheduling doctors appointments for prenatal exams and well-child visits.
- Information and support regarding parenting and adoption options.
- Provide education about safe sleep and car seat training. Pack n Play or car seat may be provided to participants if training is completed
- Post-delivery follow-up and support lasting up to 6 months
- Help with connecting and applying to Medicaid, WIC, food stamps, or Happy Bottoms
- Receive donated baby items such as diapers, clothing, blankets and bottles
- Provide referrals to community resources for assistance with rent, utilities, food, Parents as Teachers, legal, etc.

A participant in our program will be returning to work soon. She is nervous to leave her baby while she goes to work. She has also been worried about affording childcare. Though she found a friend of the family with an opening, the cost was still going to take a large part of her earnings. In addition, she needed scrubs to return to work. She was feeling overwhelmed by the financial burdens of returning to work but also knew she could not afford to stay home full time. We were able to help her with purchasing scrubs as well as provide her with donated Walmart gift cards, which entirely lifted the burden of buying scrubs. Though she is thrifty and watches her spending, she is finding the expenses for caring for a baby are adding up. It has been a blessing to help her stabilize her finances. She will be returning to work in a few weeks and her employer is offering her flexibility so that she can leave her baby with family during work hours and she no longer needs to pay for childcare.

Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas pregnancy and adoption program would like to help more women for a longer amount of time but we do not have the staff to continue services longer than 6 months post-delivery. The funding from this could be used to support women with emergency medical and dental costs during pregnancy or post-delivery. We have seen more than one teenager that gets pregnant but their parents' insurance does not include coverage for the child's pregnancy. The family can apply for Medicaid but they often do not qualify, making it that all prenatal care and delivery would have to be paid out of pocket.

With these funds, we would be able to hire a full time bilingual staff member. We have contracted translators who speak many languages from different parts of the world due to hiring resettled refugees from our refugee program but we do not have many Spanish speaking translators. Wyandotte County is a very diverse population and 30% of its population are of Hispanic origin; not having a full time bilingual staff member is a weakness of our program. All of these goals would be possible with funding we may receive from the State with the Alternatives to Abortion Program.

We currently are a PMI recipient and we receive roughly \$40,000 per year, which Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas then provides a 1 to 1 match. Our agency has to use agency funds for salaries and taxes, acquiring, managing, and supporting an intern, and collecting, maintaining, and providing gently used items to our clients. While we are grateful for these funds, we cannot do everything with the amount of funds we receive. We could provide so much more to our women and families of Northeast Kansas if these funds existed for our pregnancy and adoption program.

Thank the committee again and ask them to pass HB 2429 out of committee favorably.

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