

**Testimony for the Kansas House of Representatives  
Welfare Reform Committee**

**March 2, 2023**

**Prepared by the Good Faith Network (Johnson County)**

Mister Chairman and members of the Welfare Reform Committee, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for our concerns about House Bill 2430.

My name is Ali Haynes, and I'm a pastor at Indian Heights United Methodist Church in Overland Park. Today I am here on behalf of the members of Good Faith Network. We are a collective of 26 faith communities in Johnson County who have come together to actively pursue justice.

We are congregations of all sizes from extremely large to small, and we come from Christian, Jewish, and Islamic faith traditions. Last spring, our annual meeting was attended by more than 1,200 Johnson County residents. This spring we expect that number will be even larger as we continue to build our coalition.

One of the unifying themes that brought us together as a group two years ago was the idea that each congregation wanted to see all the people of Johnson County thrive and flourish; not just most...or some. Homelessness is one of our top priorities. We want to see more investment in housing opportunities and a safety net that catches those who are recovering from homelessness.

Every community has the ability to do more than just MANAGE homelessness, but actually END it. Communities across the country have reached what is called "functional zero" (which means that when homelessness DOES occur, it is exceedingly brief and exceptionally rare). Reaching functional zero is possible when using evidence-based solutions - not criminalizing the unsheltered and restricting state funding, as this bill proposes.

The thousands of people of faith we represent are strong advocates for one evidence-based alternative in particular: Housing First.

In March 2022, Elior Cohen, an economist with the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City published a working paper entitled 'The Effect of Housing First Programs on Future Homelessness and Socioeconomic Outcomes.' In his findings, Cohen reported that Housing First assistance REDUCES the probability of being in jail within 18 months by 95%, REDUCES the probability of having a criminal charge by 85%, REDUCES the probability of receiving emergency cash assistance by 80%, and REDUCES the probability of relying on social benefits by 35%, while ACTUALLY INCREASING the probability of reporting non-zero income by 23% (compared to baseline). Importantly, these effects are also detected 30 months after intake.

Later in his findings, he included the following statement; “[Housing First] program costs are offset by direct savings to public agencies within the first 18 months alone.” In closing. Housing First works. It is an alternative to this bill that when replicated with fidelity, offers a 100%-plus return-on-investment of tax dollars, and would deliver permanent, positive change in the lives of our friends and neighbors across Kansas.

We do not want any part of this bill enacted. We are a non-partisan group that brings people together across religious and political lines around a shared value of solving our community’s problems in a just, effective way. As people of faith, we believe House Bill 2430 is mean-spirited, immoral, and unjustly punitive. It exacerbates the problem rather than solving it.

This bill serves no worthy purpose. It simply takes away opportunities that can help a person out of their suffering. Costs for jails, E.R. visits, police interventions and ambulance rides will rise across this State. If this bill is passed and signed, and you later wonder why these costs are increasing, or why homelessness ISN’T resolving, I will ask you to please remember this moment.

Every major religion has scripture that calls us to do justice on behalf of the most vulnerable. As a coalition of people of faith, and a pastor myself, we will be praying that basic human compassion and common sense prevail as you consider this bill.