

To Chairman Francis Awerkamp and members of the Ks House Welfare Reform Committee

Eric Arganbright

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Testimony in Opposition to HB2430

Mr. Chairman and members of the Welfare Reform Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share a part of my personal story and what it is truly like to grow up homeless in rural Kansas. This is a story that have rarely expressed outside of a therapist's office, or to my beautiful wife. However, I feel compelled to share my story with the members of this committee in hopes to bring some light on how this bill has the potential to ruin the lives of good hard-working Kansans. This bill's intent to place criminal charges on families who are experiencing homelessness not because of consequences of some bad choice but because of insufficient income; partnered with the bill's ability to potentially dismantle necessary housing programs currently available to families they would be left with the same challenges my mother and I faced back in the late 1990's.

Until I was 10 years old my father was a Methodist Minister, we would move about every 3 years to a new town and congregation based on where the church needed my father to be. During this time, we would live the church parsonage, the house that was owned by the church for the Reverend and their family to live while pastoring and that church.

In the Summer 1996 I was 10 yeas old and headed into the 3rd grade, we had moved to the small town of Morganville Kansas. At this time, it was my father, my mother, my older brother Mark, my older sister Rachel, and I living together in the church parsonage. I had woken up one morning in the winter of 1996-1997 and my father had left the night before with my sister leaving Mark and I with my mother. The problem that my mother was faced with was that because the house was owned by the church and because the church needed the parsonage for the family of their new pastor and their family we were asked to leave literally in a matter of weeks.

My mother immediately had taken on 3 jobs. She was working at a gas station in Clifton Kansas which was about 15-20 miles away from where I was going to school. A diner in Clay Center Kansas which was about 10 miles away from where I was going to school, and as an overnight clerk at the Days Inn hotel in Manhattan Kansas which was about 60 miles away from where I was going to school. My older brother was 17 at the time and was able to find friends' families to take him in and allow him to live with them on a more regular basis.

My mother however had a much more difficult time finding housing for her and I. As I stated my mother worked an average of 60 hours each week making minimum wage at each job of only \$5.15/hour spending most of her funds on gas to get to and from work, but in rural Kansas you go to wherever the work is. My mother was able to find someone from time to time, who would be willing to allow me to stay the night on weekends where she tried to work most of her hours at the restaurant to have the best chance at good tips.

My mother from time to time was able to afford a hotel either at her hotel in Manhattan or the hotel in Clay Center for us to stay, but the majority of the time we went camping up and down the Republican River and near Milford Lake. My mother would do her best and frankly did a good job of me buying into the scenario of how fun and cool it was that her and I went camping all the time just like my friends did with their families. However, as I learned when I was much older the camping, I was experiencing was much different than other families.

I tell you this small part of my story for two specific reasons. The first is that if this bill was law back in 1996, my mother would have potentially received several class C misdemeanors as we would often camp on public spaces. These charges would have drastically changed our lives and it wouldn't in any way been for the better. My mother a person who was forced into homelessness not because she had made bad choices in life that had led to a substance addiction nor was our homelessness caused because she was a lazy person trying to blame others for her problems. She was a hard-working person who was unable to obtain sustainable housing because she was a victim of poverty!

The second reason I tell you this small part of my story is because it is very alarming to me how this bill threatens necessary housing programs. In 1996 there were far less and truly non-existent housing programs we have today. My mother even though she was working over 40 hours a week at 3 different jobs was never able to come up with needed security deposits and other required items needed to obtain housing. However, had my mother had access to a simple rapid rehousing program and the benefits of such a program from assistance in obtaining and maintaining permanent housing, access to case management for referrals to other programs such as mental health and childcare.

Again, I would like to thank you Mr. Chairman and the members of this committee for listening and allowing me to share what is a small part of my personal experience with homelessness. Homelessness is a real problem in Kansas and not just in areas like Wichita and Kansas City. Hard working Kansans like my mother are in need of solutions that address the causes of homelessness such as lack of income and the amount of safe and affordable housing and not bills geared towards demeaning hardworking Kansans with criminal charges and destroying necessary supportive services. It is for these reasons I stand in strong opposition to House Bill 2430.