

Care Beyond The Boulevard

Compassionate Healthcare For All

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Jaynell Assmann. I'm a mastered prepared family nurse practitioner and the founder and CEO of Care Beyond the Boulevard, a street medicine team in Kansas City who provides healthcare to those experiencing homelessness in the metro. I reside in Kansas City, Kansas.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present to all of you today.

As a constituent and a nurse leader, I am here today in opposition of KS HB2430. As you know, this legislation would criminalize homelessness and divert money from support of those who are working with this population. HB2430 was written with no evidence to support the criminalization or blatant dehumanization of outlawing homelessness. A similar law went into effect in January in Missouri, and for those who serve both sides of the state line, there has been a noted negative human effect. Individuals who are engaging in outreach and services are more reluctant to ask for help for fear of arrest or charges, and there is a greater mistrust in those providing direct outreach services.

Housing is healthcare and the literature shows that ongoing primary care is extremely important for individuals with mental illness. The housing first model is highly effective in allowing homeless individuals with mental illness to achieve stable housing. Housing first works by meeting people where they are. Healthcare is not cookie cutter, forcing individuals into compliance is not humane. It is vital to meet people where they are, mentally and physically in order to make a difference in each human life that is touched.

Care Beyond the Boulevard provides healthcare to those living in poverty and homelessness by the unique approach of going directly to the people. Healthcare services are provided by fully licensed medical providers; physicians and nurse practitioners with various other medical and non-medical volunteers working to provide compassionate care to those served.

In 2022 care was provided to 3000 individuals in 9000 visits. Nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of those served identified as street homeless. The goal of the care provided is to work with individuals to improve their physical and mental health and bridge the gaps in care and work with people to achieve their individual long term housing goals.

Our organization was founded in 2016, and during this time we have had the opportunity to serve thousands of people. For those living outside, it is rare to find anyone who chooses homelessness. So many of those we provide healthcare to are there due to illness, either physical or mental, addiction or childhood trauma that has resulted in the inability to function within the norms of society.

Instead of criminalizing poverty and disparity, the focus should be switched to providing services with the realization that homelessness is not a choice, addiction is not a choice, mental illness is not a choice.

As you know, Kansas has not expanded medicaid, thus those suffering from mental illness who cannot hold a job, lack the ability to obtain and maintain adequate mental health treatments. In my seven years of working directly on the streets, I dare to say I have yet to find one individual who lives outside who does not suffer from some type of mental illness, this bill would literally criminalize mental illness.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, there is no time like the present to do the right thing, reject HB 2430. As a healthcare provider, it is my ethical duty to provide equal care for all regardless of their situation. This bill would prevent me and the other healthcare providers who serve with our team from fulfilling

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those ethical obligations. Criminalizing poverty is wrong, criminalizing mental illness is wrong, this bill is wrong for Kansas.

Thank you.



Jaynell Assmann, APRN-C

CEO



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