

Kansas House Committee on Welfare Reform Room 152-S  
300 SW 10<sup>th</sup> St. Topeka, KS 66612

2/28/23

Dear House Committee on Welfare Reform Members,

I am providing this testimony in opposition to House bill 2430. The approach proposed in this bill fails to offer or provide any intervention based on sound evidence for effectiveness. Criminalizing homelessness has been an approach employed by municipalities across the country at various times and has proven to be ineffective. This approach has proven to aggravate the issue by burdening homeless households with additional debt and court obligations that inhibits their ability to obtain employment or housing. This approach also increasingly burdens an already overworked judicial system. And it ignores the well documented fact that a significant portion of the homeless population (approximately 50%) are persons with Severe Mental Illness and disabling conditions. Households experiencing homelessness face significant burdens, barriers, and challenges to alleviating the issue. This bill will increase those burdens, barriers, and challenges, rather than reduce them.

Considering that half or more of the households experiencing homelessness are persons experiencing a severe mental illness, criminalizing homelessness will result in the state's jails operating as punitive mental health sheltering system. This result is clearly evidenced across the country in communities that have historically enforced illegal camping ordinances, including Lawrence, KS where I presently reside. When those communities are enforcing illegal camping ordinances, the judicial system becomes burdened by individuals caught in a chronic cycle in and out of court and jail.

While no intervention is perfect, there are interventions proven to be more effective at significantly reducing homelessness. The common components of effective interventions are accessible, affordable, appropriate housing, and appropriate supportive and rehabilitative services. I have worked as a direct homeless and affordable housing provider and program administrator for 20 years. During this period, I have worked in partnership with the Lawrence Douglas County Housing Authority to operate a supportive housing program in which 80% of households served maintain their housing. This program evidences the effectiveness of interventions that provide adequate housing and supportive services.

These types of programs have been woefully underfunded and inadequately supported to meet the existing need. Inadequate support has resulted in the current national and state homeless crisis because we have neglected to develop and maintain a diverse stock of accessible, appropriate, affordable housing type and sufficient treatment and supportive service, and because we have neglected to address poverty issues in general.

This neglect has also demonstrated that the private, for-profit housing market is unwilling or incapable of providing the needed housing despite increasing numbers of households with significant housing insecurity due to cost of living increases and despite clear documentation of low income and disabled household affordable housing needs. For example, virtually no single-family dwelling units have been

built in my local community within the last ten years that have been offered on the market for less than \$200,000.00.

Presently, as we look at significant workforce development in Shawnee, Douglas, and Johnson Counties with the construction of the Panasonic factory and the expansion of the Goodyear factory, affordable housing access will become an even greater need. Most of the workers in those facilities will not be able to purchase a house exceeding \$200,000.00.

Leadership must understand that to address this issue as a community will require significant investments in a wide spectrum of affordable housing types and services. Within my local community, the cost of meeting the affordable housing need that exists today is estimated to exceed \$80,000,000.00. To address this will require policy that allocates significant funding to affordable housing development and supportive services.

An example of effective policy to address this would be state legislation requiring the state, counties, and municipalities to commit, in addition to any and all existing fund commitments, an additional 3% of annual discretionary funding to affordable housing development for households earning less than the area median income and commit 3% of annual discretionary funding to supportive housing and treatment services.

Criminalizing displaced households and penalizing local communities fails to acknowledge that homelessness is a symptom of wider, endemic cultural and social issues. Yes, the individual has a level of culpability in their life circumstances, but so too does the community have a level of responsibility. Additionally, people who are sick, impoverished, or otherwise incapacitated need help. As a wise man once said, "It is the sick who need a physician, not the healthy." It is irrational and unrealistic to expect those in our community who are the most disadvantaged or dysfunctional, who are the least capable and who have the most limited access to resources to somehow self-acquire the capability, resources, and functionality necessary to overcome their circumstances.

Sincerely,



Mathew Faulk