

March 1, 2023

Good afternoon Chairman and Members of this Welfare Reform Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **opposition of Kansas House Bill 2430**.

My name is Rachel Russell, Director of Community Engagement, at Cross-Lines Community Outreach. However today I don't stand before you with my professional title but as the individual person that I wake up as every morning. I identify as a black woman and mother of three beautiful black children, two daughters and one son. I share these very personal household demographics with you because House Bill 2430 is a racist attack to disproportionately criminalize those who look like me, that I raise, and that I serve.

African Americans make up 13% of the general population but more than 40% of the homeless population. In Kansas, African Americans makeup 7.6% of the population but more than 24% of the homeless population. Homelessness is not only a social or economic issue, but one of race as well.

The racism embedded into the very fabric of our country has been critical to an intersectional examination of race and homelessness. Structural racism prompts systems that perpetuate racial inequity and reproduce racial discrimination, failing to provide equal opportunities for people of all races. Racial discrimination has limited economic opportunities for Black and African Americans, compounded by prevalent experiences of mass incarceration, barriers to education, generational poverty, and the loss of family and support networks. The foster care, health care, employment, and homelessness systems have also reinforced racial inequity and barriers to stability. Black individuals experiencing homelessness are subject to inequitable outcomes due to racism across intersecting systems.

Structural racism shapes the experiences of people of color struggling to become stably housed. Throughout the 20th century, discriminatory housing policies restricted the economic mobility of Black Americans. The local response systems and their effectiveness determine a person's ability to successfully escape homelessness. Structural racism has now evolved to permeate systems of access for people of color, exacerbating rates of poverty and homelessness for this population. Federal measures related to poverty and hardship began to be collected in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite periods of progress, there are well-established patterns of racial disparity that can be seen across them. Blacks have disproportionately high adverse outcomes, and White Americans have disproportionately low ones.

In response, homelessness service leaders and people with lived experiences of homelessness have been working together to develop a framework for building racial equity into community interventions. This framework highlights four critical areas for these interventions: equitable system decision-making power, lived experience, quality data, and system outcomes. Institutions must actively seek to dismantle racial inequity within social systems and reduce high rates of homelessness for Black Americans. House Bill 2430 does the opposite and is why I'm asking you to remove this item from consideration for the sake of my children and those that I serve.

Thank you for your time - Rachel Russell