

Proponent Testimony HB 2330

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Chair, Rep. Susan Estes, and members of the committee,

I am here today to express my strong support for HB 2330, which designates November 14 as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in the state of Kansas.

This bill honors the legacy of Ruby Bridges, a courageous young girl who, in 1960, became the first African American student to integrate an all-white elementary school in Louisiana. While Ruby's story can make some uncomfortable due to the rampant racism she faced—from her neighbors to the political opposition of her state Governor—it also highlights the profound empathy shown by her teacher, who agreed to teach her as the only student for the entire first year.

Ruby Bridges' experience serves as a reminder that progress often comes with discomfort. Her story illustrates the stark reality of racism, but it also reveals the incredible empathy that can exist in the face of adversity. Today, I see the reactions of denial and defensiveness playing out in our culture, which often hinders meaningful dialogue about our history.

We need to shift the narrative toward fostering empathy and understanding. Ruby recalls not only the hostility she faced but also the kindness she received from many white individuals during her journey. This duality highlights that while divisions exist, compassion can prevail, and we can overcome barriers when the full truth of history is recognized.

Celebrating Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day can provide a platform for students to learn about civil rights, the significance of Ruby Bridges' actions, and the importance of standing up against injustice. By engaging with her story, students can explore themes of resilience, empathy, and community, essential for their development as informed citizens.

I would like to see more individuals respond with empathy and understanding, recognizing the injustices of the past while taking action to create a more inclusive future. When confronted with uncomfortable truths, we should encourage dialogue that leads to advocacy for social justice and community engagement.

Having heard Ms. Bridges speak, I was deeply moved by her reflections on both the hostility and kindness she experienced. Her journey is not about separating people but rather showcasing what we can achieve when we acknowledge our history and embrace empathy.

In conclusion, I urge you to support HB 2330 to designate November 14 as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in Kansas. This bill honors an American hero while promoting values of empathy, understanding, and resilience that are crucial to our society.