House Committee on Education
Testimony in Support of HB 2203 January 15, 2026
Kathryn Meinhardt – Mother of Children with Prenatal Exposure, CEO of Dream Acres & President of Kansas FASD Support Network

Good Afternoon Chair Estes, Vice Chair McNorton, Ranking Minority Member Stogsdill and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kathryn Meinhardt. I am the mother of seven children with various levels of prenatal alcohol exposure, I am the founder and CEO of Dream Acres FASD Community and the president of the Kansas FASD Support Network. I am here today because families like mine desperately need HB 2203 to pass.

Over and over again, as a parent, I have fought for my children to receive IEPs and supports at school. Too often, I was told my child was not “bad enough” or not “behind enough” to qualify for help.

What they didn’t want to see was what happened when my child became lost or confused.

When the lesson moved too fast or the material was over his head—even in fifth grade—my child didn’t raise his hand and ask for help. He checked out. He shut down. His brain could not keep up, and instead of support, he was ignored because his struggle didn’t look disruptive enough.

Another one of my children crawled around her second-grade classroom, acting like a kitten. That was labeled as a behavior problem.

It was not a behavior problem.

It was a brain in distress. A brain seeking comfort, regulation, and relief from anxiety. But instead of support, she was disciplined.

FASD affects brain development. Many children with FASD function at about half of their chronological age. That means a ten-year-old may process the world like a five-year-old—but expectations never change. Because the world and educators don’t see the brain-based disability.

Teachers don’t see the frustration my kindergarten child felt when handed a pile of clothes and told to get dressed. His brain could not even recognize what the clothing items were, let alone know what order to put them on. He wasn’t being defiant. He was overwhelmed.

Educators often say a child is being willfully disobedient. They point out that the child can list all the rules and all the consequences for breaking them.

What they don’t understand is that knowing the rules is not the same as being able to follow them in the moment.

The brain with FASD cannot always process fast enough when emotions are high, when sensory input is overwhelming, or when anxiety takes over.

Teachers don’t know what it feels like to be labeled “bad” when your brain is just trying to get its needs met.

They don’t know what it’s like to need weights on your ankles just to feel grounded in your body.

They don’t know what it’s like to explode because you cannot tolerate one more second of the buzzing lights in a classroom.

They don’t understand the confusion & pain that a first grader experiences when they get use of the slide taken away because “you don’t know how to use it correctly” – climbing up the slide to get your sensory needs met is apparently now illegal on the playground.

HB 2203 matters because it would finally recognize FASD for what it is—a brain-based disability that requires understanding, accommodations, and support.

This bill would help children get help before they are punished, supported before they are traumatized, and understood before they are labeled.

Our children are not bad.
Their brains are injured.
And they deserve better.

That is why I have gone on to do the work I do today.

After raising children who were misunderstood, mislabeled, and denied support, I realized the problem does not end when school ends. Children with FASD grow up. Too many become adults without housing, without services, and without understanding.

This is why I founded **Dream Acres**, an FASD community created to provide supportive living for adults with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders—adults who deserve safety, dignity, and the chance to thrive with the right supports.

It is also why I serve as the **President of the Kansas FASD Support Network**. Families across our state are facing the same battles I faced. They are exhausted, they are unheard, and they are trying to keep their children from being harmed by systems that do not understand brain-based disabilities.

HB 2203 is about changing that story.

Kansas has the opportunity to lead our nation by recognizing FASD in our schools and special education so that they are responding with compassion instead of punishment.

One in twenty people in the United States is living with an FASD.
One in seven pregnancies is alcohol exposed.

This is not rare. These are our children, our students, our future adults.

Thank you for being leaders who are willing to listen, learn, and act. Thank you for being poised to show that Kansas truly cares about families like mine and about the thousands of Kansans living with FASD. By supporting HB2203 you will do exactly that.

Respectfully,
Kathryn Meinhardt

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