

Melody Bitzer  
Testimony In Support of HB 2131  
Kansas House Judiciary Committee  
January 30, 2025

My name is Melody Bitzer. My father was Kansas exoneree Pete Coones. Otherwise known as offender number 93985, since that is what the state of Kansas reduced his identity to – a series of numbers. I have my own series of numbers though. 12. That is the numbers of years my dad was wrongfully imprisoned. 14. That is the age I was when my family was torn apart. 27. The age I was when the truth was finally seen. 108. The number of days my father was allowed to be the free, innocent man that he was, before the cancer that went undiagnosed and untreated during his wrongful incarceration, took his life permanently. That brings me to number 2366. Had HB 2131 been in place almost 16 years ago, maybe my father would still be alive today.

At 14, I didn't really understand everything that happened during my dad's trial. However now that I'm an adult, I am able to grasp the situation more accurately. I must admit, I am angry. Angry that lies are valued higher than the truth. Angry that an untrustworthy "witness" and a selfish DA used immoral practices and lies in order to win at the expense of an innocent man's life. I'm angry that there is still nothing in place to protect innocent people from this happening again and again. I'm angry that there is no accountability for so called "informants" or the prosecutors that use them, even knowing they have records of lying.

Opposing this bill could quite literally mean life or death to an innocent person. I hope that if anything, our pain and suffering, and my father's death are not in vain. I hope our story can lead to change. Change that is very much needed in order to prevent this sort of tragedy from striking any other family. I strongly support passing this critical legislation.