

February 11, 2025

Written Testimony in Support of HB 2320

Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Chairman Goetz, Vice Chair Hill, Ranking Minority Member Winn, and Members of the House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Thank you for the chance to provide testimony supporting HB 2320, a bill that would allow children in the department's custody for children and families to attend any school district in Kansas.

My name is Gabriella Pogany, and I am a peer mentor through the Kansas KVC Peer Mentoring Program, a Kansas Family First Family Council Representative for the KC Region, and member of the Engaging Parents and Developing Leaders workgroup. I bring with me the lived experience of having been both a child in care as well as a mother who successfully reintegrated with her son via Kansas foster care.

This bill offers youth in care the chance not only to complete their education but also to regain the typical high school experience that every child deserves. During my youth, I faced the repercussions of being in foster care, constantly changing schools during my freshman and sophomore years. The frequent moves led me to truancy, a lack of community and friendship with peers, and a struggle to keep up with my schoolwork. The situation resulted in the threat of being held back a year, which was disheartening and severely impacted my mental well-being, and prevented me from earning my high school diploma. The discouragement and the prospect of being held back led me to drop out of my sophomore year. This left me feeling robbed of my educational opportunities due to the bureaucratic challenges of school transitions.

If this bill had been in place during my time in care, it would have significantly influenced my educational journey. Seamless school transitions with timely record transfers would have facilitated my academic focus and ensured I could stay on top of my studies without unnecessary disruptions. Building a rapport with peers and educators would have been more natural, diminishing the feelings of isolation and the stigma of being a foster child entering class late. This supportive framework would have positively impacted my mental well-being, enhanced my academic performance, and fostered a sense of confidence in my educational pursuits.

I appreciate the Chairman and esteemed committee members for allowing me to share my story with you all today. Your attentive consideration is deeply valued. I hold firm belief in Kansas' continued leadership in supporting our youth, particularly those within the foster care system. I

respectfully implore you to carefully deliberate on this pivotal bill. Your advocacy and decision-making possess the potential to profoundly impact numerous lives.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at gabriella.guido.gg@gmail.com or (785) 615-8127.