

Written testimony only

January 29, 2022

I am a proponent of Senate bill 276.

Chairman Hilderbrand and Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee Members:

I would like to bring to your attention a situation that happened here in Kansas while I worked for the State of Kansas as a Rehabilitation Teacher. There was a client of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, who came to us for blindness skills training because he wanted to maintain custody of his young daughter. VR sent this blind client to a rehabilitation center to learn the skills he would need to live and be successful as a blind person. He completed this program and learned all the skills of blindness. Even though he had the skills DCF still took his daughter from him. He then spent two years doing everything DCF asked of him. He submitted to parenting classes, drug testing, and anger management classes. He completed every class successfully. His VR counselor testified on his behalf at his court hearings to the fact that he had the blindness skills he needed to care for his daughter and keep her safe. Still in the end they took his parental rights away from him and allowed his daughter to be adopted by her foster parent.

My personal story is in 2011 I was given the great honor to co-parent my twin niece and nephew. They were 9 weeks premature. When I went to the hospital the nurses questioned my ability to handle the twins. Then when they were told that I was going to be their care giver, my ability to give them the proper care they needed was questioned. We became so concerned about being turned into DCF that I told my cousin to stop telling the hospital staff I would be their care giver and we made the heartbreaking decision that I would not go back to the hospital anymore to see the babies. We made this decision because we were afraid the state would come in and take the infants from my cousin because of me. The twins will be eleven next month and they are healthy and happy and have as much confidence in my ability to care for them as they do their mother's.

Sincerely,

Donna J. Wood, 2nd Vice-president
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