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Proponent for SB 276
Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee
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Chairman Hilderbrand and members of the committee:

My name is Mike Burgess. I am the Director of Policy & Outreach at the Disability Rights Center of Kansas (DRC). DRC is a public interest legal advocacy organization that is part of a national network of federally mandated organizations empowered to advocate for Kansans with disabilities. DRC is officially designated by the State of Kansas as Kansas' protection and advocacy system. DRC is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, organizationally independent of state government and whose focus is the protection and enhancement of the rights of Kansans with disabilities.

I am here today to share our support for SB 276.

While I am very supportive of the bill as drafted, the problems the bill seeks to address also apply to parents with all types of disabilities.

The National Council on Disability (NCD) wrote an extensive report in 2012 on parenting with disabilities called *Rocking the Cradle: Ensuring the Rights of Parents with Disabilities and Their Children*

Their report found the following:

Removal rates where parents have a psychiatric disability have been found to be as high as 70 percent to 80 percent; where the parent has an intellectual disability, 40 percent to 80 percent. In families where the parental disability is physical, 13 percent have reported discriminatory treatment in custody cases. Parents who are deaf or blind report extremely high rates of child removal and loss of parental rights. Parents with disabilities are more likely to lose custody of their children after divorce. In addition, prospective parents with disabilities have more difficulty when it comes to accessing reproductive health care such as assisted reproductive technologies, and they face significant barriers to adopting children.

This bill seeks to address one of the findings in the NCD report.

FINDING 2: The child welfare system is ill-equipped to support parents with disabilities and their families, resulting in disproportionately high rates of involvement with child welfare services and devastatingly high rates of parents with disabilities losing their parental rights.

While this report and the findings are not specific to Kansas, some of the problems highlighted certainly do happen here. They certainly do happen to parents who are blind as well as parents with other disabilities as well.

The full NCD report can be found at

https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/NCD_Parenting_508_0.pdf

Again, I am pleased to share our support for SB 276 as drafted, but also ask the committee to consider expanding it to include other disabilities as well. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.