

Written PROPONENT testimony for HB 2669 AN ACT Codifying the mental health intervention team program administered by the Kansas department for aging and disability services in state statute.

To: Madam Chair Senator Molly Baumgardner and members of the Senate Education Committee

From: Dawn Greene-Vaden, Holy Savior Catholic Academy

Date: March 18, 2024

Madam Chair Baumgardner and members of the Committee,

My name is Dawn Greene-Vaden, I work as a Certified Nurse Assistant working third shift at Zack Group, and currently have one child attending Holy Savior Catholic Academy, in Wichita, Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony as a PROPONENT to bill HB 2669.

Since the day that my family and I decided to enroll my oldest daughter into Holy Savior Catholic Academy, we have experienced something that no other school has been able to give us before. Holy Savior Catholic Academy treats us like family. My daughter since then has graduated from there and gone on to High School. I also enrolled my youngest son, Darriq. While my children attended this school, we have gone through the most trying times.

First, COVID- 19, and second, my daughter, Jessica, while completing her last year at Holy Savior got bit by a brown recluse and was in the hospital for a month and a half. I didn't have to face it alone. When I had trouble keeping the bills paid while staying in the hospital with my daughter, I wasn't alone. When my youngest son, Darriq, and my daughter, Jessica, saw their younger cousin die in front of them and I didn't know what to do, how to explain, or if my comfort was enough, I was not alone. When I found out a year ago that I had breast cancer and I had to be in the hospital and go through surgery, I wasn't alone. When I didn't have much to give for Christmas, they showed so much love and compassion and gave these children the best Christmas ever. I wasn't alone. They were there. My family was there.

Still, to this day after Jessica has graduated and is now close to graduating from high school, the people at Holy Savior Catholic Academy and from Children 1st, the organization that helped coordinate so many of the crucial social services for our family, still ask, "How is my Jessica doing?" When Darriq went through these trials and didn't know how to deal with these things emotionally, they became that safety and security net for him and this family. Every day I worry less and trust more knowing my kids are safe. They are more than a school. They are family. The saying that I have always heard was it takes a village to raise children. I didn't really know what that felt like outside of my family until I enrolled my children at Holy Savior.

While you may have a vision that all students attending a non-public school are paying \$10,000 or more a year, I can guarantee that is not the case for myself and the other families who send their children to Holy Savior Catholic Academy. My family is blessed to be a part of the Holy Savior family. I know that God has a plan. With the help of a Children 1st budgeting class, I am now in the process of purchasing the home that we once lived in as public housing. With a modest mortgage, my children qualify for free lunch at the school without the stigma of feeling less than others who can afford it.

I chose Holy Savior Catholic Academy to assure that my children would get proper education. Being able to not just dream about a future but have the ability to live it.

Due to COVID-19, Holy Savior was able to partner with Children First CEO Kansas, a social service non-profit organization to provide social workers and a therapist to school for mental health interventions. My child benefited greatly from this service. Darriq, being so young, had a hard time expressing himself with all the trials and tribulations that we went through on top of dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. At the time when children are learning themselves and how to build relationships COVID took that away. Children 1st became family first in our hearts. They supplied me with a class on budgeting and life skills to help my family and others see a way out of poverty. The faces of parents around the room were like my own—we felt a sense of relief. We saw a light that was not dim and the end of the tunnel. I am thankful for what they have done for us and so many other families. I confidently can say WE CAN AND WILL MAKE IT!!

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for allowing me to provide support for HB 2669. Please feel free to reach out to me if I can be of assistance to you in this worthy endeavor to protect our children and provide needed services to them. Thank you for your consideration.

Dawn Vaden-Greene
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