



Testimony of **Destination Innovation Inc** to the

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Opponent of HB 2021 • **3/8/2023**

Chair Senator Kellie Warren and Members of the Committee:

Hello, my name is Marquetta Atkins-Woods and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Destination Innovation Inc, a hub of youth leadership development and home to Progeny, which is a program dedicated to youth touched by the juvenile justice system or impacted by that system.

I want to address the harm that HB 2021 will bring to Kansas youth. According to a report from PrisonPolicy.org, nearly 16,000 youth are detained in juvenile facilities. 4,000 of those youth are detained on status offenses or technical violations. Some judges on average opt to detain youth in over 26% cases, which leads to a lot of youth sitting in detention centers, who are not even serving sentences. Now if on average 4,000 of those youth are being detained on status offenses or technical violations of parole, which are not behaviors that are not law violations for adults, aren't we doing a disservice to our youth?! Evidence supports that confinement leads to worse outcomes, so how is this legislature designed to incarcerate youth longer helping? Proper accessibility to mental health services is a huge issue in our state and is only exacerbated when we incarcerate youth. Separating youth from their support systems impacts the mental health of youth in major ways.

The time has come to look into restorative justice and actually use the funding from Senate Bill 367 as it is designed, to fund programs that are proactively work to decarcerate youth. Rather than find ways to usurp our decision to keep kids out of jail, this committee should find ways to make reinvestment dollars available to organizations who work with youth BEFORE they enter the juvenile justice system.

Too often we want to address the wound, without addressing the infection. We criminalize youth without addressing the systemic issues that lead to young people making poor choices. We like to point fingers without addressing the generational trauma we are handing to our youth. Our young people have a worldwide view of the world through the internet and social media are exposed to so much more. In my work, I encounter youth every day who based on their rap sheets, would be stigmatized. These young people are leaders, changemakers and are moving the needle to change the perception of youth. Progeny named themselves that, because they wanted adults to see that they are what you created and we as a society have to take accountability. Accountability is not throwing our youth in jail.



I am pleading with you to reject HB2021 and let's look into more restorative/healing solutions to counter issues with youth.

Thank you for your time,

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