

March 6, 2024

Kassi McDowell, Parent Advocate/ Lived Expert

Kansas Family Advisory Network

Verbal Testimony in Support of HB 2536

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Testimony of Kassi McDowell

Good morning, Chairperson Gossage, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of HB 2536, the S.O.U.L. Family Legal Permanency Option.

My name is Kassi McDowell, I am a person with lived experience and the tri chair of the Soul family practice and implantation team as well as a Parent Advocate for Kansas Family Advisory Network. I am here to speak on and support of house bill 2536 the S.O.U.L. family legal permanency option. I am very honored to be here speaking with you today as I extend my heartfelt gratitude to be a person with lived experience here talking with you. So as you know, there are many young people that enter the system for all different kinds of reasons. Statistics show that 62% emancipate or age out of the system and only 36% will actually reach permanency, 24% will be homeless at least once and 1 in 5 will be homeless at age 18. These young adults are much more likely to be arrested, serve jail time, and become addicted to drugs than their peers. I am coming here as I am one of them young adults. Reflecting on my journey as I had to go through

the child welfare system both as a youth, and as a parent sometimes it was not easy, and a lot of times felt trapped in thinking I was never going to be able to accomplish anything. Young people that are currently in the system may be feeling trapped as they have no voice in the matter of what happens to them, but if we are able to pass house Bill 2536 the soul family permanency option. It will give the young people a different permanency option and a voice for them to have a say in where they may be placed, which may allow for a better chance for them to succeed in their future. A lot of young people have went through trauma and have never felt a sense of belonging. If house bill 2536 was passed, it would give them an opportunity to fill that sense of belonging with a forever family/ community. it is so amazing that you are sitting here, listening to us tell our testimonies of how far we have come as we went through a difficult time in our lives. Allowing this bill to pass would be absolutely amazing for the young people.

I appreciate you taking the time to listen today and hopefully you're able to open up your hearts and minds to be able to make this a permanency option for these young people in Kansas instead of aging out/or emancipating without having a forever family. Family means everything.

Thank you so much for your time today and have a blessed day.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at kassi.mcdowell@kfaninc.net.