

March 6, 2024

Marquan Teetz

Verbal Proponent Testimony on HB 2536

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Good afternoon, Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Erickson, Ranking Minority Member Pettey, and Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee members.

My name is Marquan Teetz, and I am speaking in **support of House Bill 2536 the SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option.**

During my time in foster care, my great-aunt graciously took care of me and my brother for a period. Unfortunately, at 16 I was forced to sign out of kinship care to avoid reentering the system, resulting in the painful separation from my brother, who remained in Kansas foster care, and my subsequent homelessness in adulthood. This decision to emancipate was driven by a desire to forge my own path, despite the challenges that lay ahead.

Had SOUL Family been available, it could have provided a crucial support system for my aunt and me. The program's emphasis on supporting kinship care could have allowed us to remain together, offering the necessary resources and guidance to navigate our unique situation. Instead of facing the daunting prospect of going it alone, the presence of SOUL Family support would have empowered us to overcome obstacles and make informed decisions about our future.

As you consider legislative measures to enhance the foster care system in Kansas, I urge you to explore and champion initiatives like SOUL Family that prioritize family unity and support. My personal journey underscores the potential positive impact such programs can have on the lives of those navigating the foster care system, especially young people, like myself, who did not have the opportunity to benefit from such support.

It is disheartening to note that a significant percentage, approximately 60%, of youth age out of foster care without any form of assistance, leaving them isolated without essential benefits or support.

SOUL Family serves as a beacon of hope in addressing this critical gap. By providing a structured and supportive framework, it offers a lifeline for young people in foster care, creating a sense of belonging and connection that is often lacking in their journey. The program's emphasis on fostering relationships within existing family structures, such as kinship care, is especially significant in promoting stability and a sense of security for these youth.

As you deliberate on legislative measures to enhance the foster care system in Kansas, I encourage you to recognize the transformative potential of the SOUL Family. By making this permanency option available, we have the opportunity to empower young individuals in foster care, ensuring they receive the necessary support and guidance to navigate the challenges they face, thereby improving their chances for a successful transition to adulthood.

This legislation, the SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option, addresses critical gaps in our current foster care system, offering essential support to youth facing circumstances like mine. By prioritizing family connections and providing resources, SOUL can prevent unnecessary separations and guide young individuals toward stable futures. Supporting this legislation means investing in the well-being of vulnerable youth, fostering family unity, and empowering them to overcome challenges. Your endorsement of the SOUL Family will make a lasting impact on the lives of those navigating the foster care system in Kansas.