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SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SEN. WILBORN, CHAIRMAN
TESTIIMONY SB 150
SUPPORT

Mr. Chair and Committee:

Thank you for allowing a hearing today on SB 150. When victims of domestic violence are trying to leave a dangerous situation, safe housing is key. Moves must sometimes be made quickly. But emergency shelters are often full and landlords can deny housing to these victims because of their history. Housing protections exist already for those discriminated against for other reasons, like race, sex or religion. Now it is time to extend housing protections to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and stalking.

SB 150 says that landlords cannot deny housing because someone is a victim of domestic violence, if they otherwise qualify. It also says a landlord cannot evict them because of their situation. If the victim must leave the property immediately, with SB 150 they may have an affirmative defense and not be liable for future rent if conditions are met. Rules are set out for documenting the abuse, and landlords can charge a reasonable termination fee.

Kansas has taken steps in other areas to protect victims of domestic violence. For example, the "Safe at Home" law (KSA 75-451 to 75-458) allows victims to obtain a substitute mailing address so they cannot be tracked by abusers through the U.S. mail system. In our employment laws, we prohibit discrimination and retaliation by employers for victims of domestic violence (KSA 44-1132) and allow for unemployment benefits if a victim must leave a job (KSA 44-706). SB 150 is a natural extension of protections to some of our most vulnerable Kansans.

I believe SB 150 will save lives. We know that domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and their children. We also know that oftentimes victims have not been able to hold jobs or obtain financial resources. Safe housing is an important step toward leaving an unsafe situation. The least we can do is to make sure these victims are not discriminated against in housing when they do try and escape danger and abuse.

I ask for your support for SB 150 and would be glad to answer any questions.

Senator Dinah Sykes
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