

Members of the committee,

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2552. It's truly a pleasure to meet each and every one of you.

Currently, foster youth receiving social security benefits have their money covertly taken by the government with no recourse or notice. This issue holds a deeply personal significance for me. At the tender age of 13, I lost my father to a relentless form of cancer. My mother, grappling with addiction, was unable to provide the care we needed, which led to my four siblings and me being placed in foster care. *Shockingly, we were never informed that our social security benefits were being taken from us.* The state simply assumed the role of the representative payee. Had I not been vigilant about the funds meant for our family, we might never have known about this injustice that resulted in just me personally losing over \$18,000.

In my pursuit of help, I penned letters to various public officials seeking assistance in rectifying the foster care system, but sadly, no one responded. Undaunted, I channeled my determination into a campaign for a school teacher running for the Michigan State Legislature. I spent countless hours knocking on 10,000 doors after school and on weekends. Thanks to our collective efforts, that school teacher secured his election by approximately 500 votes despite being outspent 10:1, and I was fortunate enough to earn a position working in the Michigan State Legislature. It was there that I had the opportunity to work on legislative solutions to address this pressing issue.

My journey took me further, and I subsequently worked in the United States Congress under the leadership of General Jack Bergman (MI-01), where I had the privilege of championing my passion for foster care reform at a national level. Since then, we've worked tirelessly to meet with lawmakers, engage philanthropists, and even earn recognition from national media for our endeavors.

With this context, I implore you to please support House Bill 2552 to give foster youth a chance at success.

Sincerely,

Justin Kasieta