

Testimony on House Bill 2772

**To: Chair Susan Concannon
House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care
Monday, February 19, 2024**

Good afternoon Chair Concannon and members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to speak before you today in favor of HB 2772. My name is Jaylon Romine and I am currently a senior at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, where I will be receiving a Bachelors of Arts degree in Indigenous and American Indian Studies on May 3, 2024. I am a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and am originally from Eufaula, Oklahoma. Although I am not from Kansas, I am very grateful for the opportunities I have been given during my time at Haskell and will never forget the friends and memories I have made in my 3 short years living in Lawrence (not to mention celebrating a National Championship). I would also like to thank the State Legislature for being so kind and receptive towards me during my time as an intern for the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), where I currently work under Leigh Keck, Director of Governmental Affairs. My experience with KDADS last semester helped me secure a Native American Congressional Internship in Washington D.C. this past summer in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior. My experience in this Statehouse and even this same committee room helped me succeed at the federal level and I am honored to return to KDADS for another legislative session.

For the record, my testimony today is not associated with KDADS by any means. When it comes to HB 2772, I do not have any data to share only my personal experience and my 4 years of formal education with American Indian history. My family has been directly impacted by similar legislation in Oklahoma and my tribe has been impacted by American history, stretching back to the 1540's. HB 2772 can be seen as the Kansas version of Public Law 96-608, which is commonly referred to as the "Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978" (ICWA). Several states have enacted their own versions of ICWA and I believe that passing legislation that fits both the needs of tribal and state governments, will always lead to a path towards positive government-to-government relationships. I would like to share a bit of personal information about my family and my community back home in Oklahoma.

I have 2 younger brothers who are 11 and 12 years old, both of which live with our father in Owasso, Oklahoma. Growing up, I had to watch my father, his siblings, and my grandparents struggle with substance abuse and going in and out of incarceration. I am technically a 4th generation Boarding School student and my great grandmother, Emma, was actually a part of the inaugural 2nd grade class at the Eufaula Female Boarding School in 1899, which is still in operation to this day as a Dormitory for Muscogee Youth across our reservation. As a consequence of a long and traumatic history of forced removal and forced assimilation, my

father was never around much and I barely got to know his side of my family until I was about 15 years old. Fortunately, I grew up surrounded by a strong tribal community in Eufaula and was able to learn my tribe's history directly from tribal members. My Muscogee history has always been a source of empowerment and determination for me. I try to teach this history to my younger brothers as much as I can. My younger brothers have had to see our father and their mothers struggle with addiction first hand and the younger one, Eli, struggles with symptoms of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome to this day. Eli is the youngest of our fathers 6 children and has witnessed the most trauma. When he was 3 years old, Eli entered the foster care system in Oklahoma because of his parents substance abuse issues. Oklahoma's ICWA legislation allowed for him to live with our Uncle Patrick rather than some stranger who doesn't know our tribal values or how American Indians operate. Today, I am very proud to say that my father is 3 and a half years sober and has regained full custody of Eli and is living with his wife and our brother Royce's family.

Another component of Oklahoma's ICWA laws allow for American Indian children to re-enter their family homes, even after going through the lengthy and stressful foster care system. Section 8 of HB 2772 prioritizes the needs of the 4 tribes of Kansas by giving preference to Indian families for any Indian child seeking adoptive placement. As many of you may already know, the 4 tribes of Kansas are not even indigenous to this area and were forcibly relocated here by the United States federal government, just as my tribe was relocated to Oklahoma. The history of violence and oppression committed against tribes by state and federal governments is a reason why Haskell was created in the first place, to remove Indian children from their traditional homes and to educate them to become American citizens, by whatever means necessary. The language in HB 2772 will be a major step towards healing the trauma within Kansas' tribal communities, which was caused by outside, non-Indian governments. HB 2772 not only protects Indian children but it protects the future of tribal communities. Our children ARE our sovereignty and legislation like HB 2772 ensures that Indian children and their needs will be prioritized by the state of Kansas. Thank you for your time and I encourage you to pass out HB 2772 favorably as amended. I will be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.



Jaylon Romine

Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma

Haskell Indian Nations University

President - Iota Chapter

Phi Sigma Nu

2/19/2024