



Written PROPONENT TESTIMONY for HB 2789

To: House Committee on Health and Human Services Chairwoman Representative Landwehr and members of the Committee

From: Catelin Curnes, House Director of Selah Home

Date: February 16, 2024

Madam Chair Representative Landwehr and members of the Health and Human Services Committee-

My name is Catelin Curnes, and I am the House Director of Selah Home in Lawrence, KS. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony as a PROPONENT of bill HB 2789.

I have the honor of meeting women who are walking through some of the hardest days of their lives and listening to their hearts. How they get to Selah Home varies, but the common thread is that they are pregnant and want to give birth to their child but have nowhere to go. Many had housing but their decision to give birth to their child has caused friction in a relationship which has changed that. Some feel like placing the baby with an adoptive family would be best, and others have a deep desire to raise the baby they are carrying. After seeing this need repeatedly, Insight Women's Center felt called to open Selah Home to allow women the option of stable housing so they would not feel forced into a decision to terminate their pregnancy when they did not want to.

The day I meet them is the day they have nowhere to go. Any support system they had is broken. That may be due to drugs, severed relationships, incarceration, death, or a lack of means; but the day I meet them the reason doesn't matter. Their needs are immediate: food, shelter, safety, clothing, and healthcare. If there is a room available at Selah Home, then we get to say "welcome home, you are safe here" and begin meeting those immediate needs so that the real work of healing from trauma and breaking generational cycles can begin.

Maternity Homes allow for multiple benefits to the woman, the child and the community they live in. There are the instant advantages of having a mother and baby who are housed, safe and supported. Practically this means less stress on mom which in turn is less stress on a child. This quote from *Obstetric Medicine* shows the power of reducing maternal stress. "Both the direct and indirect effects of prenatal stress can have lasting consequences for both development, and functioning of offspring across the lifespan."

Our program aims to provide a safe, Christ-centered residence where pregnant women and their children can grow physically, spiritually, and emotionally on a hope-filled journey toward healing and independence. This is done through a wrap-around approach including individual and group counseling by licensed therapists, weekly coordinating of care by a nurse on staff, case management, devotion time, and individualized pregnancy and parenting education all while providing 24/7 on-site support. Mothers can come at any point in pregnancy and stay until their baby's first birthday - there is no cost to the residents to live at Selah Home.

The cost of housing & programing for women and their babies is high, but I believe the rewards are higher. Breaking unhealthy cycles, helping these women recognize their own value and become independent members of our communities is a victory for everyone involved. The funding we will receive from the Pregnancy Compassion Act will supplement our donor support allowing us to hire more staff, expand training on the best ways to serve our residents, bring in life skills classes, accept more women who are searching for support and look at expanding our services as we evaluate the needs in our community. For all of these reasons, and the many other potential positive impacts I strongly urge you to say “yes” to HB 2789. Thank you for your time.

Coussons-Read M. E. (2013). Effects of prenatal stress on pregnancy and human development: mechanisms and pathways. *Obstetric medicine*, 6(2), 52–57.
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