

Hello! My name is Stormy Lukasavage, and I am here today to voice why I am staunch advocate for client directed representation and why Kansas should push forward in moving towards it. As a former foster youth, I come from a world where we are stripped from the decision-making process, and it affects the quality of our god given process to self-govern. Just a hypothetical situation but could you imagine yourself stripped from everything you had known in a removal from your family in what seems like a few seconds?

It is quintessential that we take youth voice into consideration. As a former youth myself, I've advocated the right to legal council for foster youth throughout all fifty states. Kansas does have mandatory council, but it needs to be pushed further to fulfill the right to client directed council because foster youth need that to be fully capable to advocate for their best interests. It matters because without accounting for the best interest of the youth then we push them potentially farther into falling towards negative outcomes. And these youth could be law abiding citizens or victims of statistics based off the actions we take.

Client directed representation is the legal standard for adults in a court of law. So as foster youth, we are thrust into situations that are very adult oriented without the ability to directly communicate their hopes and expectations about their case. I personally spent 3 years in foster care and have no recollection of meeting my Guardian Ad Litem. Because I was not able to have adequate say into my case, it led directly into a conflict of interest over my permanency status where it was planned that I would move back in with my abusive stepfather as opposed to finding a safer alternative. I did not have any channels to voice my opinions and it led to self-expression through a violent self-mutilation for someone to finally ask me what was going on. If that client directed representation was there, then I would have less scars to remind me what happens when you go unheard and unrepresented.

The final reason as to why that I ask for client directed representation is simply for accountability. When youth are subjected to the mercy of a larger system, it is profoundly easy for them to fall through the cracks. I was fortunate enough to escape with only scars, but other youth are not as lucky. This would ensure that youth can have their day in court while ensuring that adequate legal representation serves the best interests for these young individuals who find themselves victims to circumstances beyond their control.