



February 28, 2023

Chairman Averkamp and Members of this Welfare Reform Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **opposition of Kansas House Bill 2430**.

My name is Rob Santel, Director of Programs at Cross-Lines Community Outreach in Wyandotte County. We are a non-profit organization that serves as a safety net for our community providing crucial services in the areas of hunger relief and housing stabilization.

Through our intensive street outreach program in Wyandotte County, our team goes out alongside those from the community behavioral health center and the Kansas City Kansas Police Department providing housing-focused supportive services. In 2022, our team worked with over 400 persons experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness; connected at least 150 households to permanent housing resources; and had more than 1,200 contacts or interactions with persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness. In Wyandotte County there are zero emergency shelter options for single adults or families. The most common barrier to housing we see is a lack of safe, quality, and affordable housing options (costing no more than 30% of a household's gross monthly income).

HB2430 was written from the philosophy and perspective that the criminalization of homelessness works. This is not supported by research or evidence. ***The criminalization of homelessness does add more barriers to housing, employment, and recovery.***

Working in the Kansas City metro has given us the vantage point of seeing the negative impact the implementation of similar legislation has had in Missouri. **The displacement of people from encampments has had a significant hardship on the system.** In addition to the dramatic increase of behavioral health crises that have resulted from the traumatic camp decommissioning, persons with once known locations are now transient making connections to services significantly more challenging.

**I would encourage this committee to instead invest in proven strategies, like Housing First programs.** Housing First is an approach that asserts that an individual or family can be housed without needing to be "fixed" in any way. Homelessness is understood as a housing problem. Helping people achieve stable housing first, allows other issues that may impact housing stability to then be addressed.

Fundamentally, people can be housed without requiring that they are compliant, sober, have employment/income, or even have to be nice. The core principles are:

- Everyone is housing ready
- Supports are individualized
- People are empowered to make decisions in their own life
- Recovery is possible
- Social and community integration is key

I am grateful for KDADS who has significantly invested in implementing Housing First strategies across the state and contracted with the leading expert Sam Tsemberis for this.

I am also here today to speak to you on behalf of:

- Tim who entered homelessness 5 years ago after being discharged from prison to the streets with \$150. Since being connected to supportive housing, we have been able to get him treatment for a chronic health condition and assist him in applying and getting approved for SSI.
- Julia, who was a home health aide until the pandemic when she lost her housing and had to live in her car. Once she was able to find supportive housing, she returned to work and has been successfully housed.
- Rodney, who stayed in our extreme weather shelter project. Once he was able to find affordable housing, he became sober and found a job all on his own.
- Bird, a chronically homeless veteran, who utilized emergency services (police, EMS, and emergency room) on a consistent basis. Since being in a supportive housing program, he has become sober, engaged with his mental health team, been connected to benefits, and dramatically decreased his interactions with emergency services.
- Marcos, who became homeless after his wife died and someone stole his benefits card. At the beginning of this winter, we were convinced he wouldn't survive. Once we were able to help him find affordable housing, we've been able to get him reconnected to his benefits, he has sobered up, and his overall health has dramatically improved.

These are just a few real stories that illustrate that people fall into homelessness for a myriad of reasons and that **housing-first strategies works**.

*Housing is healthcare.*

*Housing is treatment for severe and persistent mental illness.*

*Housing is treatment for substance use.*

*Housing ends homelessness.*

You will be receiving testimony from professionals across the state in the fields of mental health, substance use, health care, and housing that overwhelmingly agree that we need real solutions to homelessness. **House Bill 2430 is not a real solution to end homelessness in Kansas.** In the words of researcher Ian De Jong, "Let experts do their job and beware of snake oil salespeople. There are some consultants who make far-fetched claims, use questionable methods and frankly make data up. Check their track record. Closely."

Respectfully Submitted,

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