

Written Testimony

Senate Bill 276

March 9, 2022

My name is Bruce Roberds. I reside at 2323 N Gentry Dr. Wichita, Kansas 67220, Sedgwick County. I am the proud Grandpa of Haedyn Roberds. This is a testimonial about my fears associated with my blindness when I needed to step up and assume full care and responsibility for Haedyn. The anxiety I experienced leads me to be in support of Senate Bill 276.

My Grandson Haedyn was born November 6, 2019. He was born quite premature and would spend the next month in the neonatal intensive care unit at Via Christi St Joseph hospital. His mother was incarcerated at the time so my son Michael assumed the sole responsibility for Haedyn. During the month in the hospital Michael visited Haedyn everyday sometimes twice a day and on several occasions I went with him for the visits. During these visits I proudly used my white cane to navigate the parking lot, hallways, and pathways of the hospital.

I had been legally blind for over forty years and until just the last couple of years before Haedyn was born I had rejected the use of a white cane. When I finally gave in to trying the cane out, I found it gave me greater confidence in navigating my surroundings and I used it proudly. I want to convey the freedom and confidence I felt with the use of my cane even though the details are another story for another time.

On the day Haedyn was to be released from the hospital DCF stepped in and determined that Michael could not take him home with him and that Haedyn would have to go into foster care. Michael called me and asked if I would take Haedyn and of course I said yes. I was so happy to be able to help, but then fear set in my mind because of previous stories I had heard. With DCF already involved and Haedyn being in NICU, would someone question my ability to take care of him if they know I am visually impaired? As a result my next visits to the hospital including the required overnight stay for hospital staff to observe me with the baby; I folded up my cane and put it away. I did not want to call any attention to my blindness.

During the overnight observation of course the nursing staff noticed my visual impairment. I have to say the nurses were very supportive and tried to help me find ways to work around the

issues such as mixing formula. However the Doctor in charge at the time of Haedyn's discharge really grilled me with "what if" scenarios. I don't know if this is routine or not but his last question I know was directed specifically at my situation. "How are you going to know if this baby stops breathing and turns blue"? I must have answered it to his satisfaction; however this question just helped reinforce my fears that they were going to find a reason using my visual impairment to keep me from being able to take Haedyn home with me.

Fortunately I was able to take Haedyn home with me. He suffered from severe acid reflux for his first eight months resulting in him having distressed breathing on numerous occasions, his lips turned blue on at least two occasions and he lost consciousness once. I was in touch with his pediatrician with all of this who continued to assure me I was doing everything right and to keep up the good work. Haedyn is now twenty seven months old, has had no more breathing problems, and I am now in the process of adopting him.

In conclusion I want to say while I experienced no real adversity from DCF or hospital staff, I had some real fears of adverse actions. I believe SB276 will greatly relieve the fears in others that I experienced through this process.