

## Testimony for HB 2338 We Kan Drive by Stormy Lukasavage

The need for a reform in the field of transportation within the realm of foster care is paramount. When looking at the state of both the nation and the state of Kansas at the end of 2020 it becomes abundantly clear that there are strides being made in improving socioeconomic conditions for foster care while also focusing in on honing in on positive mental health guidelines for social workers to strengthen for youth. Within the state of Kansas however and transportation is limited overall and receives little to no focus. The rationale of this statement for reform comes from both personal and professional experience and reflects multiple accounts wherein transportation is limited from youth who hold foster experience. The modus operandi being ultimately a call to arms to expend energy into transportation infrastructure within the mostly rural state of Kansas.

In terms of clarifying my professional status, I serve as a consultant to the Capacity Building center in D.C. with a substantial amount of my work taking place on a national scale. One of the larger projects undertook involved organizing youth to be involved within a roundtable oriented around the current pandemic. There were numerous issues discussed throughout the multiple roundtables and a core problem brought up with each one was the fact that youth were left unemployable due to the pandemic. A byproduct of that was how transportation became a bigger issue due to limited resources. These youth were not able to go to their places of employment and also missed out on valuable appointments. Driver's education classes throughout numerous states were cut in order to ensure and maximize effectiveness of local quarantines.

That brings us to what is happening locally within the state of Kansas. One of the biggest barriers has to be the rural environments that take up large portions of the state. Herein, I discuss my personal barriers and how I was left vulnerable from not being able to get from point A to point B. The bulk of my time in care was spent in a group home where resources were allocated to those who were believed to have the most potential in terms of transitioning into being a thriving adult. My local high school was several miles away. There were a lack of afterschool activities that I could do since I couldn't assure daily punctuality. I had to walk to get to my ACT, an important tool in regards to post-secondary education. We were punished under the condition that we had to meet an employment status. However, it was hard to achieve that when you do not have access to transportation. I remember one Sunday in which it was blistering, I walked twenty miles around my capital town to get job applications. In the end, I was left soaked in sweat, dehydrated, and my feet were bleeding from such a hike. I still could not meet the required sanctions and my laundry money was taken.

The city of Topeka has stepped back from their Metro bike programs which many low income people relied on for a means of transportation. Bus stops have advanced from my time from being benches to mini shelters, but still are very open to both the elements and a lack of safety. I recall several instances of people throwing objects at me while waiting for a bus. Moving forward, if this state really wants to prioritize foster care as a rallying point, then I urge those in charge to not forget about accessible transportation. There are so many youth with the "drive" to succeed but are held back because of something that is assuredly fixable.

About Stormy: Stormy Lukasavage is currently serving as a Young Adult Consultant for the Capacity Building Center for States. As a Young Adult Consultant, Stormy facilitates trainings for current and former foster youth and child welfare professionals. He is also working developing briefings regarding the impact of current sociopolitical events on the child welfare system. His current project includes gathering feedback from youth and young adults on their needs and the supports they are receiving related to the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice issues. Stormy is a Kansas foster care alumni and former President of the Kansas Youth Advisory Council. He is a graduate of Washburn University.