

Testimony of:

Brittany Smith, Former foster youth

In opposition of SB 410

Topeka, KS

My name is Brittany Smith. I was in foster care for two years. As an alumni of the Kansas Youth Advisory Council, I have also been in contact with many different foster youths from around the state. I am writing this letter in opposition of the bill SB 410. As a former foster youth, I feel this bill is not in the best interest of youth who are in the care of the state. In this testimony, I will discuss three points. These three discussion points are: how there are many different types of families, what makes a foster family a good family, and how a separate tier of CARE families can affect the efforts to recruit more foster homes.

Families come in all different shapes and sizes. My first foster family was a married couple who, for the most part, met the criteria to be a CARE family. They had been married for at least 40 years. We went to church twice a week. They did not smoke or drink. The foster father worked while the foster mother stayed home. They were wonderful foster parents and I felt safe and comfortable in their home. On another note, my second foster home was a single woman on disability. She smoked and we did not attend church. She was equally as wonderful as my first set of parents. She treated me just like her own child. Many foster youths that I have spoken with have had positive experiences with foster families that do not meet the criteria of a CARE family. I even knew a young man who was in a great foster home with a single father. Families that meet the criteria to be a CARE family are already eligible to be foster parents under current regulations. Putting a specific type of family on a separate tier from the typical foster families may send a negative message to families that do not meet the criteria of a CARE family that they are not good or adequate enough.

One cannot say that there is a certain type of family that is the best. What makes a foster family good is whether they provide foster youths with what they need. These youths have most likely been through things that no child should ever have to go through. In addition to having their basic physical needs met, what foster youth need most is love, safety, security, stability, and support. They need a place where they feel comfortable. Whether the foster parents are single or married, whether they go to church or not, whether the children are homeschooled or go to public school, a good foster home is a home that provides the youth with the essential elements mentioned. Having a family meet the requirements of a CARE family does not ensure that a foster youth will receive the things they need in that home.

Kansas is in dire need of more foster homes. While I understand this CARE families program is not meant to replace the current eligible foster parents, I feel that having a specific type of family on a separate tier may discourage potential foster parents from applying. Potential foster parents may feel they are not good or capable enough and then decide not to be a foster family. Potential foster families may get the impression that CARE families are supposed to be "normal" families. In reality, "normal"

families cannot be defined and, as I mentioned before, good families come in all shapes and sizes. In conclusion, SB 410 is not in the best interest of foster youth because: there are many different types of families that are wonderful, CARE families do not necessarily ensure that they are placed in the best home, and having CARE families as a separate tier may discourage potential foster parents. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify for this bill.