

**Testimony Presented to the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare  
Committee In Support of SB 393  
Claire Branstetter**

Dear Chairman Pilcher-Cook and Committee Members,

My name is Claire Branstetter. As a student who both volunteers and does research on domestic violence, I am very pleased to see a bill like SB 393. In light of making abuse a factor in custody decisions, I would like to bring a related issue to the committee's attention. Adopting this law will mean some women who gain custody or residency of their child may be more free to seek shelter with a domestic violence agency. This is a positive side-effect. However, currently the law in Kansas doesn't guarantee these shelters all the safety it could. Whether or not we actually see an increase of women seeking shelters services due to this bill, shelters would be safer if it were illegal for the public to reveal their locations.

At first glance it may not be evident why this is necessary, but there have been several cases when a non-shelter worker gave out a location. For example, one shelter had a neighbor put up a sign in his yard exposing the location to everyone who drove by. Law enforcement could not legally make him take it down. Another example comes from Wichita, a human trafficking hub. I have spoken with the founder of the Raise My Head foundation (addresses human trafficking) about her dilemma. They have been wanting to build a rehabilitation home, but this already tricky task is being complicated by one Facebook user with an opposition to having "those kinds of people" near his home. This may be enough to keep them from starting a shelter; confidentiality can be a matter of life and death for those who are seeking help from abuse.

The importance of confidentiality is why Kansas law protects shelters from needing to provide their location to outside businesses. Specifically, this is statute 45-221 (a) (47) which state "Certain records not required to be open; separation of open and closed information required; statistics and records over 70 years old open. Except to the extent disclosure is otherwise required by law, a public agency shall not be required to disclose Information that would reveal the location of a shelter..."

Kansas could take this one step further by doing what 19 states have already done, and create legislation enforcing the confidentiality of domestic violence shelters among the general population. <sup>1</sup> By adapting a California law to Kansas needs, we can make it a crime to *intentionally* disclose the location of any trafficking or domestic violence center.

Though this is not directly a matter of custody, it is quite possible that some of these women will need shelter services. Please consider adopting this simple change to make Kansas as safe as possible for survivors of abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Kirby, Michelle. "CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION ON SAFE HOUSES." OLR Research Report, n.d. Web. 18 Oct. 2015