

February, 11, 2015 – Testify to the Kansas State House of Representatives

Good Morning State House of Representatives; My name is Sherdeill H. Breathett, Sr. and I live in Wichita, Kansas. I've been a proud resident of this fine state now nearing 25 years.

Let me begin by commending you all for the fine commitment you display week in and week out, giving your best to make this a place where we all can be proud to live, play and retire. I know it's not easy and sometime it's a thankless position but none the less you keep at it and we are the better for it.

I appreciate you allowing me this time to share on something that is very near and dear to my heart; Marriage! I'm deeply concerned about the state of marriage in our great state. Marriage is the foundation of our society. Statistics suggest that fifty percent of marriages will end in divorce. Financial reasons are considered by most as the number one cause of failing marriages. I come from the school of a different thought. I believe poor communication is our greatest threat to sustaining marriages. Lack of tools

in our toolbox to navigate the challenges on this journey we call life. I appeal to you today that you make every effort within your arsenal to strengthen marriages. I come as a practitioner of marriage. My journey did not begin with a good marriage. Matter of fact, what I encountered as a child growing up in Chicago and Kankakee Illinois was an abusive situation. My mother worked hard to provide for her eight children but you know that was not an easy task. I was number seven of eight. My dad had a good stable job working for Argon National Laboratory for thirty-three years but he lived a different lifestyle that was not afforded to us, his children. Although he and mom never divorced he stayed in the city of Chicago while we suffered outside in the suburbs. When my dad came around he was always drunk or soon to be drunk. His action of abuse towards my mom and us was the apex of domestic violence but during that time period who really knew what that was?

That experience scared my siblings and me. It resulted in all three of my sisters marrying into abusive relationships that ended up with them being more scared than before and now single, wishing to have other marriage options but none in sight. Who wants damaged goods! The mental, physical and psychological damage is more than one can imagine. I have two of my

older brothers in and out of jail, dealing with their own addictions that continue to linger as they approach sixty years of age. Both of whom did not complete high school. They're considered illiterate on all scales. They can't keep a job because of their addictions; hustling doing God knows what to make ends meet.

Here's why I'm sharing personal information; although we all grew up in the same environment, had the same parents, lifestyle and lived in poverty conditions, why did some excel while others struggled? What's the difference maker? Not having a solid foundation!

Healthy Marriages is a sound and solid foundation. Please note I said "healthy and not perfect." A perfect marriage does not exist! I had a mentor who had a healthy marriage. Being exposed to my mentor and seeing the opportunities life had to offer being exposed to their world and environment took me to a whole new level. Their child is currently a professor at Harvard. No accident! As a result I was able to provide somewhat of an example to my younger brother what a healthy marriage looks like. He now is married and celebrating twenty-three (23) years of marital bliss. Does it matter, does it matter? Ask my brothers son! Ask my children! Ask the

countless number of children who have had the blessing of growing up in a home where both mom and dad worked through their challenges to raise a stable home. I know some will criticize me and us for taking this stance for marriage but I'm sharing my experience and I'm no different than anyone else. See, I bared scares from my dad's toxic lifestyle imposed upon me. My sports accolades were impart to my hidden anger. I knew that I did not want to be confined to anyone's jail or prison cell. Sports were a catalyst for me to act out my frustrations without repercussion. Karate and football were the vehicles I used to vent my anger. My mentor played a significant role in that process also. School was not easy for me. I struggled with the basics because I blew the opportunity. It's tough to think about math, science, English and history when you have an empty stomach.

Please do all that's within your power to insure we every Kansan has access to good tools to navigate a healthy marriage. Minimize avenues for troubled couples taking the road of least resistance to divorce by first recommending mediation, some forms of counseling. I'm NOT suggesting couples living in unhealthy marriages continue in that lifestyle. I am saying that if before any physical and mental abuse takes place that couples have good ample resources available to utilize and get some help. I realize that all marriages

will not make it but I feel we have a responsibility to our society to put some measures in place to help navigate healthy marriage and stable homes that provide a sense of security to raise our children and future leaders.

The fourth floor at the Sedgwick County Court House is a zoo on some occasions with the number of family falling apart for many reasons. I believe we can stand in gap and make a huge difference by providing:

- Pre-marital Classes (provide an incentive to reduce the cost for marriage license for those that take it)
- Post-marriage check ups
- Mentoring Couples who younger marriages to can connect with

Those are just a few suggestions and I'm sure we can come up with more.

In closing, I'd like to say we have made this issue tougher than is really is.

Marriages have been the bedrock for our society for many years. I believe a lot of the social ills we experience in our communities would greatly minimized if we get back to the basics; keeping the main thing the main thing!

I could go on but I will stop. If you have any questions I will do my best to answer them.