

**House Committee on Children and Seniors
March 15, 2022
Lou Ann Kibbee, Systems Advocacy Manager**

Thank you Chair Concannon and committee members for allowing me to present my testimony to you today. My name is Lou Ann Kibbee and I am the Systems Advocacy Manager for Southeast Kansas Independent Living (SKIL) Resource Center. SKIL is a Center for Independent Living that advocates for the rights of, and provides services to, thousands of people of all ages with all types of disabilities annually across the State of Kansas. We fight for justice and equality with and for them, to have the same opportunities as other people do. Opportunities to live in our homes, receive the supports and services needed, receive an equal education leading to a productive and fulfilling vocation, develop relationships and families as desired, get involved in our communities, and partake in recreation and hobbies as we choose. We are driven by a philosophy of consumer choice, in that we have the freedom to make decisions and choices about our lives, as well as having the dignity of risk.

Parents with disabilities are discriminated against by state and private agencies and courts by removing children from our homes based solely on our disabilities. Whether we have an intellectual developmental disability, mental health, blindness, deafness, or any other physical disability—it happens quite often. Individuals with disabilities are also not regarded as potential parents to adopt or foster children either. Or if allowed, we are highly scrutinized to the point that everything possible is required without accommodations to assure we fail the “testing”. SKIL works with people with all types of disabilities. SKIL has seen parents with all kinds disabilities whose children have been taken from them through the years. New parents with intellectual/developmental and/or mental health disabilities whose babies are taken at birth. Parents who acquire a disability through an accident whose children are removed from their home. A mother with an acquired disability whose children were taken from her and given sole custody to her ex-husband that had past convictions of very deviant behavior charges. She had sole custody prior to her disability. We assisted her in getting legal representation, which after a long battle she was determined the custodial parent. These types of actions are so destructive in tearing apart families causing great harm to children and parents.

More States are changing their parenting laws to have stronger protections of parents with disabilities. SKIL supports SB276, but it must go beyond protecting parents who are blind. The State of Kansas needs to assure these protections cover a parent no matter what type of disability they may have. We should have every opportunity to parent whether we need services and supports to do so or not. Many of us with disabilities have raised children just like those of you without disabilities. It just takes one person to start questioning our ability to parent, when the barriers and discrimination begins. If amended, SB276 will help protect all of us from these types of discrimination and dissolution of our families.

SKIL asks that you amend SB276 to include people with all types of disabilities and move it through the committee.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today! I am happy to take questions at any time.

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