

February 15, 2018

Kansas State Legislature
House Committee on Children and Seniors
HB 2745 Transition Bill of Rights Task Force
Position: Support

Dear Chairperson Davis, Vice Chair Gallagher, Ranking Member Ousley and Committee Members,

Thank you for your pro-active efforts to address the challenges with Transition Services for students receiving special education services in the public school setting. ***I am writing in support of House Bill 2745 Establishing a Kansas Transition Bill of Rights Task Force.***

My name is Jawanda Mast. Since my daughter was born with Down syndrome over 18 years ago, I have been advocating for individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities. Rachel and I first spoke to this committee three years ago when we spoke in support of the **Kansas Achieving a Better Life Experience Act**. Rachel is now 18 and will graduate from Olathe South in May. Rachel is frequently invited to speak, represent and advocate. She always says, "I love my life." These are some of her senior pictures.



I often speak to families who have been frustrated by the lack of supports, direction or even information regarding the transition process. As you may know, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), requires transition services for students receiving special education services to "be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team." Despite federal and state laws outlining this process, many parents do not receive this information or these services. Some parents do not know, some of us are tired, and others must beg.

I myself have found this process to be frustrating and quite honestly, some of the "experts" difficult. In Rachel's situation, I inquired as to why none of the agencies or transition specialists from the Olathe district were at her first meeting following her 16th birthday. I was told they had been invited. There was some follow-up including a call from the district transition specialist. She told me she didn't attend meetings until the junior year. I explained that by that point Rachel would be almost 18 years old. She explained the district's "two programs" and stated that Rachel would not be eligible for either of the district's 18 – 21-year-old programs because she

had not been in the “CREWS” program. CREWS is some type of job training program offered to special education students in high school. I inquired as to whether this policy was in writing and was told it was not. The transition specialist went on to tell me these were the only programs available. I inquired about Project SEARCH and the response was, “Oh yes, I guess I should have told you about that program.” Most parents would not have known to even ask about the program. I said that Rachel wanted to go to a post-secondary program and was told the “district’s program was focused on job training and not post-secondary programs.”

We had her official transition meeting near the end of her junior year when she was almost 18 years old. The representative from Vocational Rehab showing up to Rachel’s transition meeting 25 minutes late. The excuse was “we aren’t morning people.” Rachel wants to go to a post-secondary program so her transition meeting seemed like the appropriate place to discuss this. It is on the transition goal sheet on her IEP. When I broached this subject, I was again told the Olathe post-secondary program focuses on job training. Upon inquiry they indicated that they do not track this. No one officially knows whether this “job training” is resulting in meaningful, competitive employment for the students who participate in the 18-21-year-old programs. However, we do know that upwards of 70% of adults with intellectual disabilities are not employed in jobs with competitive wages. This should tell us that we have a broken system. None of this even begins to touch on the complex and chaotic process of dealing with the multiple agencies and personalities.

Like her typical peers, Rachel is in general education classes. She was also the first student with Down syndrome admitted to the ECCO (Early Childhood Careers Opportunity) program and worked there learning what it is like to be a teacher. Part of the class was to work in the developmental preschool three days per week. During her senior year, she has worked as an office aide and received high praise for her outstanding customer service. Rachel tells everyone she loves her life. Like other 18-year-olds she wants to go to college, get away from mom and dad, have a meaningful job, and at some point, get married. Yes, she also wants to live in a pink house!

Rachel needs extra supports to make her dreams reality, and she needs an advocate like me to help her achieve these dreams. I am an educated parent who works in advocacy. I have found this process to be overwhelming so I’m not sure what that says for families who do not have the information, education and supports afforded our family. Though I believe the district is failing Rachel when it comes to the transition process, I am so tired and weary of dealing with them that we are opting to be done with them when she graduates on May 20. We are trying to figure out transportation, supports, which agency does what and identify places where Rachel may be able to get part-time employment while she attends Johnson County Community College. I can do this, but other families are not and/or do not know even know where to start.

I believe we can do better for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Some of our most vulnerable citizens need less chaos and stronger supports to be productive members of society. **HB 2745** would establish a task force including parents and self-advocates, would establish a **Transition Bill of Rights**, and require a study and report that should result in policy/program changes that would strengthen the transition process.

Respectfully submitted,

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