



KANSAS SILVER HAURED LEGISLATURE

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Written testimony to the Kansas House of Representatives

Federal and State Affairs Committee

Rep. John Barker, Chairman; Rep. Ron Highland, Co-Chair

By Jay Rowh, President, Kansas Silver Haired Legislature

Good morning, Chairman Barker, Co-Chair Highland, and members of the Committee. My name is Jay Rowh, from Beloit, and I am the Mitchell County Representative to the Silver Haired Legislature (SHL). I also am currently the president of that organization.

The Kansas Silver Haired Legislature was established in 1982 by an act of the Kansas Legislature. It is our purpose to advocate for the 500,000 plus Senior Citizens in Kansas who are over the age of 60. Each spring, our eleven regions across the state meet to discuss the concerns that are important to the Kansas Seniors in that area. Those concerns are then brought before the Executive Board of the SHL in July, where they are reduced in number to the issues most important to us. Those issues are then debated in committee and voted upon by our entire Silver Haired Legislature at our Annual Session in Topeka in October. Those issues that receive favorable passage as Resolutions or Bills are the issues that we advocate for to the Kansas State Legislature during the Kansas Legislative session that follows.

This past fall, one of those issues which received favorable passage with the Silver Haired Legislature was to encourage our Kansas State Legislature to pass a bill allowing for financial assistance to grandparents who serve as legal guardians for their grandchildren, or for other family members serving as legal guardians for family related children. This SHL bill was passed with overwhelming support, with over a 98% favorable vote.

As all of you know, raising children is a very daunting task, especially when you are on a fixed income, and maybe not as spry as you used to be. Throw in the often added detriment of turmoil and chaos in the children's lives, and this task can be even more difficult. That is why HB 2754 is so important. If the child's grandparents could be encouraged to take over guardianship during this trying period, it would greatly enhance the stability that would come with a familial relationship. We are proposing this encouragement be in the form of financial assistance. Doing so would keep the child out of the traditional State Foster Children's Program, but not in competition to it, at a cost no higher than the current Foster program, and potentially even less. And even better, the courts still have the final say since if they don't feel such a placement is in the child's best interest, they are not obligated to do so. Nothing in HB 2754 would change that.

It is the position of the Silver Haired Legislature that Kansas needs to make this win-win-win situation become reality. The State of Kansas wins by not having to place the child in the traditional Foster Care program, but with supporting, loving family members instead. The grandparents or other relatives win by getting to keep their grandchild within somewhat of the nuclear family environment. And most importantly, the child wins by getting to be in a more familiar, loving setting, at a time when uncertainty is unfortunately a major factor in their lives.

The Kansas Silver Haired Legislature respectfully requests that you please pass HB 2754 favorably out of this committee, and on to the full Chamber of the Kansas House of Representatives. The children in need of support would be the major benefactors of this action. Thank you for your utmost consideration of HB 2754.

Respectfully submitted,

Jay Rowh

President, Kansas Silver Haired Legislature