

House Transportation Committee

March 16, 2022

SB506-Providing for the north central Kansas down syndrome society distinctive license plate

To Chairman Proehl, Vice-Chair Delperdang, Ranking Minority Helgerson and House Transportation Committee members:

Good afternoon. My name is Shella Thoman and while I'm here to discuss a license plate I first wanted to say thank you. I'm not just a mom that is passionate about the acceptance of her son with Down syndrome, I'm also the County Clerk in Cloud County. That gives me a little bit of an idea of the shoes that you fill sitting in those seats. I've also been a friend of Senator Bowers for over 25 years and talk to her often and that gives me a little more insight. So, thank you. Thank you for showing up and stepping up and being passionate about making a difference for the people of this Great State!

This time 14 years ago I was having a normal pregnancy, that May I had a normal delivery and within 24 hours our son Isaac went home. When he was 3 days old, he was life flighted to Wichita and on day 8 he was officially diagnosed with Trisomy 21, better known as Down syndrome. The doctor walked out the door, I picked Isaac up and I cried. I certainly didn't know anything about Down syndrome, and I could only recall 2 people in my life that had a disability and they both needed significant care. Later that day a mom from the Down Syndrome Society of Wichita who had a 10-year-old son came to talk to us, she told me that our life was going to be incredible, there would be challenges, but our life had just changed for the better. Honestly, I did not believe her, she didn't know the first thing about our life and how this diagnosis was going to change the entire dynamic.

Within a couple of weeks, a mom of a 7-year-old from the North Central Kansas Down Syndrome Society came to visit me. She basically told me the same thing as the first mom. Within weeks I learned that I have an uncle that did his thesis on Down syndrome and was beyond excited for our journey. I started seeing people with Down syndrome places I went and meeting people that knew someone with Down syndrome. Within 6 months I had been to two Down syndrome awareness walks called Buddy Walks. I began to understand what those moms were talking about. Fast forward 14 years and I can't imagine our life without Isaac and our Down syndrome tribe of the Lucky Few. The phrase The Lucky Few started as something that came from another mom's heart when talking about her 2 children with Down syndrome and is exactly how I feel about our life. Don't get me wrong, it hasn't been all peaches and cream, there's been challenges and struggles. That entire dynamic of our life, it did change, and just as those moms said it has been for the better.

A Kansas Down Syndrome tag has been on my mind for some time. In our Treasurer's office our Treasurer has samples of all the tags available in Kansas. That wall, it is pretty full. She recently received new tags and it was then I decided it was time there needed to be a Down syndrome tag hanging with the others.

I messaged Senator Bowers and we got the wheels turning. Later in January the Board of

the North Central Kansas Down Syndrome Society met and voted to be the host agency to financially support the tag. Three weeks ago, we posted a message to our Society families encouraging them to share this exciting possibility with more of the Lucky Few tribe across the State. In those 3 weeks we have had more than a 100-families from 47 different Kansas counties say yes, I want a Down syndrome license plate.

Maybe you're thinking a 100 isn't the needed 250. Those 100 want nearly 200 plates. But we're not done reaching out. In 2020 41 babies with Down syndrome were born in Kansas. In 2019 there were 58. From 2014-2018 there were a total of 211 live births. Using those 7 years as an average that calculates to over 1,300 individuals with Down syndrome under the age of 30 born in Kansas. Kansas has multiple agencies supporting disabilities, and they have multiple agencies supporting individuals with Down syndrome and their families including the North Central Kansas Down Syndrome Society, the Down Syndrome Society of Wichita, the Northwest Kansas Down Syndrome Society, the Flint Hills Down Syndrome Families Group, Kansans in Down Syndrome Support, Down Syndrome Innovations and the Southeast Kansas Down Syndrome Society.

There is a support group in nearly every area of Kansas because these families are passionate about spreading awareness.

A portion of the mission for all of those groups are to provide services that educate, connect, and advocate for individuals with Down syndrome and to ensure full potential in community life. To that new family driving home from the doctor's office or hospital with a new diagnosis and seeing the car in front of them with a Down syndrome license plate is going to send a message. The message that they are not alone and that maybe, just maybe it is going to be okay. To families like ours, who have been on this incredible journey, it gives us another opportunity to voice support for our families and friends who have experience with Down syndrome; to raise awareness and improve the public attitudes and acceptance of those with Down syndrome.

A quick google search tells me at least 12 other States, including Oklahoma and Nebraska, have a Down Syndrome license plate. I ask you today, on behalf of my son and all the other sons and daughters in this Great State and their families to support our missions and allow us to spread awareness and acceptance everywhere we drive.