

January 30, 2013

Honorable Representative Richard Proehl
Transportation Committee
300 SW 10th Street, Room 581-W
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Support for Senate Bill No. 6

I am Marilyn Harp, Executive Director of Kansas Legal Services (KLS). Kansas Legal Services operates the Topeka Moving Ahead Program (T-MAP), a job readiness program for individuals experiencing homelessness. This “bridge out of poverty” program is an effort to help individuals get back in the workforce and become self sufficient. Through my work with these participants, I have witnessed individuals being forced to turn down employment due to a suspended driver’s license. Several businesses in the Topeka community require an individual to have a valid driver’s license for employment. Individuals without a driver’s license are limited to using the bus system in order to get to work. Due to the bus system only running until 6:15 p.m. those with suspended licenses are unable to take shift jobs (including factory, retail, and restaurant work) that end after 5 p.m., unless they can find employment within walking distance of their home.

I would like to share the story of Jackie (a real T-MAP client). She is a single mother of two children, who is currently staying at the Topeka Rescue Mission. Jackie went through the T-MAP program, a 15 week commitment of classroom learning, computer skill enhancement and an on the job placement internship. During her work in the program, she worked on her only barrier for her obtaining a job -her suspended driver’s license. Her license isn’t suspended for doing really bad things. It is suspended because she has been **poor** for many years. She got stopped for not having an operating headlight, for an expired license plate, for not having insurance (on a borrowed car). Each time, she didn’t have money to pay the fine, so her license was suspended. She made some payments when times were better, but never enough to fully pay off the tickets. She owes about \$700 in fines, which must all be paid before she can get her driver’s license reinstated. Living at the Rescue Mission and supporting her children, she will remain homeless until she can get a job.

Jackie spent seven weeks, her T-MAP internship, working at Kansas Neurological Institute (KNI) with the residents. KNI was so impressed with Jackie that they offered her a full time position. She was unable to accept the position due to the company policy that every employee must have a current valid driver’s license. Jackie has been actively working to pay off her fines, but is only able to afford a little bit a month while the rest of her resources go to support her children. If Jackie had a temporary restricted license to remove the barrier of finding employment, she would have a sustainable income allowing her not only to pay off the remaining amount owed, but she and her children would become self sufficient and get back into a home.

Kansas government has emphasized a desire to create jobs in order to improve the Kansas economy and individual self-sufficiency. I believe this bill would remove a substantial barrier preventing some Kansas residents from obtaining the employment they desperately want. At no cost to the state, this is a great program to give people the opportunity to be employed in order to

pay off the fines associated with their drivers license suspension. I hope that the committee will send House Bill 2009 to the floor for passage.

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