



TO: Senator James Leewright
Chair of Business, Commerce and Tourism Committee

FROM: Senator Mary Boren
Richard Anderson

DATE: Wednesday, September 22, 2021

RE: Statement of Richard Anderson to the
Oklahoma State Senate Interim Study (IS-2021-33)

STATEMENT OF RICHARD ANDERSON

Chair, Members of the Committee.

My name is Richard Anderson, I am the Chair of the local chapter of Oklahoma ADAPT. ADAPT is a national grass-roots community that organizes disability rights activists to engage in nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience, to assure the civil and human rights of people with disabilities to live in freedom.

Thank you Senator Boren, for calling on me to address you today in your interim study about how to invest in, and develop an on-demand transportation service for Oklahoman's with disabilities,

I am sure that a lot of you may not realize that transportation is a HUGE problem for people with disabilities in the United States, and specifically my beloved home, Oklahoma. The issue we face is being unable to travel easily within our own towns and cities, as well as being totally unable to go outside of our city of residence. This has a devastating effect on our lives, especially our health, well-being, social life, and employment. Today, I'm giving you all a prospective as to why we desperately need a true 24/7 on-demand transportation service.

I will give my story as just one example.

Besides being a lyricist, in which I couldn't achieved without an adequate means of transportation because of the odd hours and traveling it entitles, I am also a graphic designer. While there were many job openings in Oklahoma City, Moore, and cities surrounding Norman, I was denied those opportunities. I had no form of transportation to allow me to chase my dreams. For 31 years, I watched jobs after jobs being filled by other people, while I've just been stuck collecting SSI, SSDI and DHS benefits thus, draining government assistance, Medicare and Medicaid, when I could've been making roughly \$2,000 a month with benefits and putting money back into the system.

If the State of Oklahoma had better transportation as the ADA Law states since 1990, I could have had a social, and a successful career employment life. My disability probably wouldn't decline prematurely over the last 20 years, and in turn would have been saving Medicare and the state's Medicaid program SoonerCare a lot of money. Also, if Oklahoma would had invested in an adequate transportation system, which again the ADA Law states, instead of just doing enough to get by "legally", Oklahoma would had more economic revenue for the state. Not only would I have been attending events, concerts, ball games, and countless other activities, a lot of Oklahomans with disabilities would have too. Ching-Ching Oklahoma!!!

My single mother passed away when I was just 17, I'm almost 54 now. I've only been to my Mom's gravesite 3 times since 1985. My 2 sons' mother died 11 years ago, and I have only been to her gravesite once, and that was for the funeral. My 14-year-old son has already visited his Grand-ma's grave site more than I have been able to.....

The most heart-breaking thing is being an only parent and not being able to be with my sons when they need, or wants to do stuff with their father. I have to wait for their elderly grandparents to bring them to Norman from Yukon and Moore, which is usually once every two to three months. Not because they don't want to bring them, but because they are up there in age. My 14-year-old is very active. For many years, I have had to miss activities that he is involved in because I did not have a way to attend.

My almost 27-year-old has the mental capabilities of a 12-year-old. I took over as "dad" when he was 2 years old because his biological father left before he was born and hasn't been in his life. My son moved into a group home 2 years ago, right down the road in Moore. I'm in Norman, and I can't go see him due to the lack of adequate transportation services!

Then there's my biological son. He is a normal active 14-year-old. We have not yet had a chance to get to know one another or to have that important father and son bonding. Once again, if Oklahoma had invested in adequate transportation services, I would have been totally involved with his school activities, powerlifting activities, and all aspects of his accomplishments for the last 14 years!

Imagine watching your child grow up without you, while hearing a once high pitched voice getting deeper over the phone, just because you can't find a ride from 2007 to 2021. It's inhumane and immoral! I have lived a clean life, followed the rules, and done what was expected of me. Don't I deserve to teach these things to my own child?

Sadly, there are millions of people like me, who worked their butts off to be independent and self-sufficient, only to be imprisoned in their own home by our freedoms and rights-toting Government.

The disability community has lived with this issue forever. Not only is it wrong, it's basically a slap in our faces. This is the most innovative country in the world. We pride ourselves on equalities, freedoms, opportunities, and rights of, and for all!! I cannot believe that approaching the year 2022, we still have transportation as a barrier to those 4 American values. Even in Oklahoma where it's public knowledge that since 2018, Oklahoma racked up \$1.5 BILLION dollars in medical marijuana revenues! then an \$800 Million was put into the State's savings because the Legislature DIDN'T want to spend that \$800 Million dollars in 2020!!!, and now Oklahoma is expected to bring an annual, yes, annual, economic impact of nearly \$190 MILLION dollars to the state from our brand new, First American Museum!

The conversation in Oklahoma has not improved since it started in the 1980s about the needs and the well-beings of Oklahoman's with disabilities. I think the conversation should now be around all of that money I just mentioned and why hasn't, and why isn't a portion of it going to make transportation better with an on-demand transportation service for your citizens with disabilities so we can prosper in our lives, while passing it back to the State!

I hope, like me, you will work with us, as well as Senator Boren with her interim study to start making this issue a priority so that Oklahoma's disability community can live like true Americans instead of prisoners. Free to pursue all of our freedoms, happiness and rights as you all do in this room and building.

We are more than a medical condition. We are Americans, we are Oklahomans, and we are people with thoughts, hopes, dreams and souls. Free our souls by giving us a ride whenever desire or need it.

Thank You.
Richard Anderson