

January 18, 2022

Kansas Department of Transportation

House Bill No. 2458

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I am writing to you in support of HB-2458, the dedication of portions of United States Highway 56 in honor of PFC Shane Robert Austin.

As each of you are aware, Shane lost his life on October 8th 2006 in Romani Iraq at the young age of 19. In most peoples eyes, 'He was still just a boy' yet as a man, he gave his life for his country and, his Brothers in Arms. On the day of Shanes death, he volunteered to take patrol as one of his military buddies was ill. That in an of itself speaks of the character of Shane, that of a very compassionate man, not a mere boy. On that day, October 8, 2006 Shane made the ultimate sacrifice. An IED was thrown into their transportation/patrol vehicle. Shane saw the explosive device and cradled it with his own body, thereby saving the lives of his military brothers and surely preventing more injuries. A true story of a Hero, not just a boy nor yet a man. Nineteen is a very young age to make the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

By way of introduction, my name is Lisa Blackwell, I am his eldest brothers fiancé. I never met Shane, I never had the opportunity to do so. Much more importantly Shanes neice, Mackenzie Skyler Shane Austin, never met her Uncle Shane either. Nor did his four Nephews; Declan, Ryker, Camden and Keegan. Five children lost that opportunity also on October 8th of 2006.

Why you may ask am I writing to you instead of his eldest brother, Justin Wade Austin. The reason is quite simple, while 16 long years have passed, Justin is still feeling his loss. It's still 'fresh' in his mind and has strongly affected his life since then. You see, as the eldest brother it torments him that he wasn't there to protect his little brother as he always had been. Justins birthday was/is October 11th. A raw day which only brings to mind his loss of Shane. Following Shanes death Justin received a birthday gift, mailed by Shane prior to his death. It arrived in a timely manner, just as Shane had planned yet Justin was never able to thank him. To say that the loss of Shane haunts Justin each day is an accurate statement. We celebrate Shanes birthday each New Years Eve, we honor him with prayer and often luminaries.

Shanes youngest brother, Kyle Austin, has five beautiful children whom never met their uncle. Only their uncle and grandparents can acquaint them. Sadly, Terrance (Terry) Wade Austin passed on June 29th, 2021. He died

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on Hospice surrounded by "his boys" and, his grandchildren. Many stories of Shane, from his fathers perspective, will now go untold.

It would be a great honor to the Austin family if HB-2458 is approved. A great honor to the citizens of Edgerton, Kansas as well. Many of those same residents watched "The Austin Boys" grow up and also still mourn Shanes death, their town hero.

I hope my statements will assist in your decision process. Justin sits beside me as I write this to you. While 16 long years have passed, this is still not an easy topic for Justin, nor will ever be.

Thank you each for your time, consideration and, hopefully your approval of dedicating a lasting memorial for all.

Best Regards,

Justin Austin and Lisa Blackwell (wordsmith)