



THE CENTER

THE CENTER FOR THE RIGHTS OF ABUSED CHILDREN

Support House Bill 2443

Establishes in statute the Office of the Child Advocate who is responsible for investigating complaints of any person involved with the child welfare system and ensuring that children and families receive adequate coordination of services, child maltreatment prevention, protection and care through services offered.

Written Testimony

Kendall Seal, Vice President of Policy

Center for the Rights of Abused Children

House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care

Monday, March 6, 2023, at 1:30 p.m.

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Johnson, and Committee Members:

Good afternoon, I am Kendall Seal, and I serve as Vice President of Policy at the Center for the Rights of Abused Children. Our mission is to protect children, change laws, and inspire people – to ensure every abused child has a bright future.

The Center believes all children deserve the opportunity to live in loving, safe families. To that end, we support public policies and reforms that promote accountability and strengthen families through system transparency. We support codifying an independent Office of the Child Advocate.

Challenges within government, particularly Kansas' Department of Children and Families, can have life-altering consequences for children, families, and their caregivers. The most severe consequence is the death of children in custody. Through independence, impartiality, credibility, and confidentiality, an independent child



THE CENTER

THE CENTER FOR THE RIGHTS OF ABUSED CHILDREN

advocate can give voice to children, improve child and system outcomes, and facilitate collaborative systemwide improvement.¹ The proposed framework of this legislation can help guarantee the following:

- An avenue for children in foster care, foster parents, families, and agency employees to lodge complaints and seek solutions.
- Increased accountability through monitoring programs, placements, and departments providing children's services, recommending systemwide improvements, and publicly reporting findings.

Accountability and data-informed, systemic reviews are crucial for eliminating child abuse and neglect and fostering strong families.² We commend the efforts of Kansas' policymakers to improve the safety and stability of vulnerable children, support their caregivers, and enhance accountability in the systems tasked with their care. The Center encourages you to pass House Bill 2443. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the committee.

¹ "USOA Governmental Ombudsman Standards," United States Ombudsman Association, <https://www.usombudsman.org/usoa-governmental-ombudsman-standards/>; "Standards for the Establishment and Operation of Ombuds Offices," 2004, <https://abaombudsday.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/2004-aba-resolution.pdf>; Moira O'Neill, "Pulling Back the Curtain: State Children's Ombudsmen at Work," Yale University, 2011, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/5f717fc5b9cf437a6eaa395dca039487/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>; Judith Jones and Alvin W. Cohn, "State Ombudsman Programs. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/204607.pdf>.
² ACF, Within our Reach: A National Strategy to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, 2016, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cecanf_final_report.pdf