



**Neutral Testimony on HB2552 – Written Only
House Child Welfare and Foster Care Committee
February 7, 2024**

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Ousley, and Members of the Committee, my name is Rachel Marsh, CEO of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is an association of 19 private, non-profit child welfare agencies that collectively provide a full array of services for children and families in child abuse and neglect prevention, family preservation, foster care, adoption, independent living and parent, youth, and child skill-building, mental health, human trafficking prevention, and substance use treatment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB2552.

Some children in foster care receive or are eligible to receive federal cash support benefits, such as supplemental security income (SSI) - disability - or other Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits. Currently, the practice in Kansas is for the state (the Department of Children and Families) to use those benefits to provide essential food, clothing, and shelter for the child in foster care. As stated in the fiscal note to this bill, "HB2552 would no longer allow DCF to use SSA/SSI benefits to reimburse the state for cost of care. Currently DCF spends \$8.5 million dollars a year in the Foster Care budget of Social Security Account (SSA)/Supplemental Security Income (SSI) revenues to cover eligible children's foster care maintenance such as food, clothing, shelter, education, and daily supervision."

The Children's Alliance sees important benefits to children if the legislature would direct DCF to end the practice of using federal funds for the basic costs of foster care. HB2552 allows for the protection of benefits for a child's future and using those benefits to pay for the 'extras' that foster children frequently miss out on. HB2552 also requires affirmative action to seek benefits and establishes safeguards for those benefits while the child is in care. For the youth impacted by HB2552 who age out of care, the additional resources that may be at their disposal would be extremely helpful for their transition to independence. We also see possible connections related to the SOUL permanency option that may need to be considered here. Overall, we see compelling public policy arguments to protect a child's federal benefits from being utilized to pay for their own foster care.

On the other hand, HB2552 carries a significant fiscal note and may result in some administrative burdens in carrying out the responsibilities established in HB2552.

Further, there are areas such as increased social-emotional needs that children in foster care experience that we would encourage this committee to fully explore with DCF and with case management providers to ensure this bill delivers on its intended goals. Specifically, we want to ensure the legislature does not inadvertently **limit** what the Secretary can do in support of a child with these funds. An example of this is the social and emotional needs of youth attending special events, renting a tuxedo or buying a dress for prom, or going on a class trip. We support this committee fully studying this issue with the Secretary and with child welfare case management providers to learn more about how best to utilize federal benefits for children in Kansas and to ensure the bill language translates to effective practice in Kansas.

Thank you for your consideration. Although I am unable to be present in person today, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Members of the Children's Alliance of Kansas:

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