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February 9, 2024

**Re: Testimony presented to the House Transportation Committee on House Bill 2680 by Amber Rollins, Director, Kids and Car Safety, [Amber@kidsandcars.org](mailto:Amber@kidsandcars.org), (913) 205-6973**

Chairman I am testifying on behalf of Kids and Car Safety, (KACS) a national nonprofit that is dedicated to keeping children safe in and around vehicles and headquartered here in Kansas.

KACS is a passionate proponent of HB 2680. Currently there are 21 states that have laws making it illegal to leave children alone in vehicles.<sup>1</sup>

As it stands right now in Kansas, when law enforcement is called to respond when a child is left alone in a vehicle, they have only two choices. They can do nothing or they can arrest the driver and serious charges like child endangerment can be filed.

Most parents and caregivers are completely unaware of the many dangers that children face when alone in a vehicle, even for a very brief period of time and even in a “safe” neighborhood.

Children are put at risk by being left alone in vehicles in every city across the entire state of Kansas every single day! Even safety-minded parents have done it. This important legislation will deter the dangerous practice of leaving children alone in vehicles and help to raise awareness about the dangers of leaving children alone in vehicles.

Kids and Car Safety is the only organization that maintains a national database on incidents of children being left alone in vehicles.<sup>2</sup> We’ve done so for 30 years now.

- Tragically, over 1,083 children in the U.S. have died in hot cars since 1990, 15 of which happened in Kansas.<sup>3</sup>
  - Just last year in Olathe (5 minutes from my home) a father left his 3 children alone in a vehicle and the youngest, 11-month-old Augie died.

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<sup>1</sup> [Kids and Car Safety, State Laws, Unattended Children in Vehicles](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Kids and Car Safety Fact Sheet; Leaving children alone in a vehicle for “just a minute.”](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Kids and Car Safety Hot Car Data](#)

- Nationally, hundreds of children have died from knocking cars into gear after being left alone. At least 3 Kansas children have died this way according to Kids and Car Safety.
  - In Ottawa, KS two children were left alone in a vehicle, the 4-year-old boy got out and his sister knocked the car into gear running over and killing him. Their parents had just gotten home and didn't realize the danger of leaving them alone in the car.
- In January, 2017 in Wichita, a 3-year-old boy was left alone in a vehicle in a parking lot. He got out of the vehicle on his own and ran towards a store. He was run over by a driver who couldn't stop in time and killed.
- Evion Boyer, 1, died after being strangled by a seat belt after being left alone in a vehicle in Iola, KS.
- KACS has documented at least 3 Kansas children who were strangled to death by power windows after being briefly left alone in a vehicle.
- Tragically, several years ago 13-year-old Briana Ibarra, of Wichita lost her life trying to escape her family's SUV as a man jumped in and stole it with her alone in the back seat. Her family had just run into a restaurant to pick up a takeout order.
- KACS has documented at least 37 children in Kansas who were left alone in vehicles that were taken during a car theft with them inside. Not only is this a serious danger and trauma to the children and parents involved, it is an enormous and unnecessary expenditure of law enforcement resources on completely preventable incidents, especially when AMBER ALERTS are issued.<sup>4</sup>

All of these different types of incidents I've shared today are 100% avoidable with one simple thing – if children are never left alone in vehicles.

According to a survey done by Safe Kids Worldwide in 2014<sup>5</sup>, 14% of parents reported leaving a child six or younger in a parked, locked car alone. According to census data, that's nearly 2 million U.S. parents transporting more than 3.3 million U.S. children. If you apply this finding to our state this means that roughly 24,700 Kansas children in the age group of 0-5 years old are being left alone in vehicles.

Every day for the last 18 years, I've worked with parents who have buried their children – all of them in a tragedy that they never thought could happen to them or their family. A vehicle is not a safe environment for children and children left alone cannot protect themselves.

Thank you so much for your time today and thank you in advance for helping make Kansas a safer place for children.

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<sup>4</sup> [Kids and Car Safety, Cars Stolen with Children Alone Inside](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Safe Kids Worldwide 2014 Survey](#)