



Testimony in Support of HB 2536

Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

March 6, 2024

Good morning, Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Erikson, and Ranking Member Pettey

TFI Family Services is providing written-only testimony to encourage you to endorse the development of the SOUL program. This effort is an important vehicle for assisting youth as they prepare to leave foster care and achieve success as a young adult. The principles underlining this program are summarized by the SOUL acronym for Support, Opportunity, Unity, and Legal.

TFI Family Services is a private, not-for-profit agency providing a wide range of child welfare and behavioral health services throughout the state and has been in operation since the mid-1960's. Our current services include early intervention to maintain and strengthen families, foster care in both family and residential settings, adoption support, independent living services, aftercare, and case management services for youth and families in the child welfare system. In addition, our full range of behavioral health services include outpatient treatment and residential services via our Psychiatric Residential Treatment Services (PRTF) and Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP).

TFI has been a partner with the State of Kansas and other providers for over 65 years, providing these services to youth at risk for or being cared for in the Child Welfare/Foster Care system. Our experience points clearly to the need for youth aging out of foster care to establish connections—in addition to those hopefully available via biological family relations—with one or more responsible adult with whom the youth develops and maintains a positive relationship. It is through this relationship that the youth obtains SUPPORT for dealing with increasing adult responsibilities, OPPORTUNITY to learn from successful adult mentors, UNITY with an engaged adult in creating a positive approach for addressing the responsibilities as an adult, and obtains specific LEGAL sanction and direction that underpins and outlines the role of a key model adult in the youth's life.

These concepts have long been recognized by those of us who have worked together in the child welfare field. It is most critical, however, to recognize that the development and naming of this model is primarily due to the ability of youth who have been in the foster care system to articulate their needs and outline a plan to address them. That is what the SOUL permanency option is about. We strongly urge you to support the youth who choose this constructive path to adulthood and vote in favor HB 2536.

Respectfully submitted by

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