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Children's Alliance of KANSAS

Proponent Testimony on HB 2329
House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee
February 13, 2025

Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Respert, Ranking Member Schlingensiepen, and Members of the Committee, my name is Kristalle Hedrick, CEO of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is an association of 18 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, and substance use treatment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2329.

Kansas child placing agencies, residential providers, and family preservation and foster care prevention providers have always served children, youth, and families who have touched or are currently involved with the juvenile justice system. After juvenile justice reform (SB367) passed in Kansas – when KDOC foster care, and residential services began to be phased out – child welfare providers experienced a marked increase in out-of-home placement referrals for youth with more severe criminogenic behaviors. While juvenile justice reform closed the door for foster care and residential care in KDOC custody, the Kansas Child in Need of Care (CINC) code allows a child to be placed in DCF custody if that child is "without adequate parental care, control, or subsistence…" Today, it is routine for a youth to be placed in CINC foster care directly because of juvenile offender or criminogenic behaviors and, frequently, without having experienced juvenile justice services or interventions. Most often, youth are referred to child welfare when caregivers, siblings, or peers have been assaulted or injured and fear for their safety. Juvenile justice reform moved youth whose behaviors are not severe enough to warrant detention, but who are not safe to remain at home without critical prevention services, into the foster care system.

When a youth enters foster care with behaviors that place that child and others at risk – whether with substance use disorders, sexual behavior problems, physical aggression, running away, or gang involvement – the consequences of that child's behaviors also enter the foster care system. Placement in foster care does not inherently extinguish a child's juvenile offender behaviors, especially if those behaviors are rooted in a long-term trauma response. Children who are engaging in high-risk behaviors or placing others at risk, as well as their families, deserve to receive needed help to reduce these behaviors. Ensuring children receive effective juvenile justice interventions requires the support of local juvenile justice experts and services to ensure the safety of both children and the public.

Children who enter foster care as an alternative to juvenile justice are much more likely to experience failure to place, to experience placement disruption, to require higher levels of care, or to be placed in more restrictive residential or congregate care settings due to their levels of need. When these youth experience such moves and disruptions, it becomes more difficult to connect them to mental health services, keep them connected to siblings and close relationships, and maintain them in their home communities. These difficult circumstances create added traumatic impacts that can reinforce underlying maladaptive behaviors. While data reflects the success of SB367 for many youth – not getting pulled farther into the juvenile justice system - we must look at the wellbeing of youth diverted from juvenile

justice custody into foster care. HB 2329 will offer a targeted juvenile justice approach, more appropriate to address each youth's juvenile offender rehabilitation needs.

We ask that you support HB 2329 to improve care and services for children and families in Kansas.

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Members of the Children's Alliance of Kansas:

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