STATE OF KANSAS

Tenth Judicial District

OFFICE OF DISTRICT ATTORNEY

STEPHEN M. HOWE, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

February 11, 2025

To: Chairman Lewis and House Committee Correction and Juvenile Justice
Re: House Bill 2329 – Proponent Testimony
From: Steve Howe, Johnson County District Attorney

Chairman Lewis and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 2329.

This bill seeks to provide options for high-risk juvenile offenders which were taken away during the 2017 Juvenile Justice reforms. At that time many prosecutors and probation officers warned about the consequences of closing youth residential facilities which were commonly referred to as group homes. These residential facilities provided a middle ground between the corrections facility and sending a juvenile back home. Many of these juveniles needed a level of care that could not be provided by remaining in their home environment. These group homes provided training and education needed for youth experiencing behavioral and or substance abuse issues. The youth residential facilities were used for high- risk offenders who had multiple convictions or multiple and serious behavioral issues while on supervision. When families would or could no longer handle behavioral issues, these facilities provided an option other than incarceration. These facilities were vital for changing behavior and protecting the community, especially in many of our rural jurisdictions that had few if any resources to offer these troubled youth.

When we passed SB 367 the well-intended goal was to take the money saved from running the youth residential facilities and reinvest the money back into the local community resources. Even though Johnson County has the largest population in the State and the greatest opportunity for counseling and therapy resources, allocating those resources as imagined has been difficult and challenging. In our rural communities these at home resources are rare and unavailable to many Kansans. This reality was discussed in 2017. Having one facility to handle these high-risk youth is a resource needed in our juvenile justice system.

If you are to approve of these changes, I would ask you for some additional language to the bill. The Evidence Based Program Account (EBPA) by law is to be used for home-based services. You would need to add "youth residential facility" to the list of potential resources earmarked for these funds. It would also be necessary to provide further clarification on what types of cases would make an individual eligible for placement at the residential facility.

Reinstituting a youth residential facility option gives us another tool to correct behavior for some of the most challenging at-risk youth. This small step could close a vital gap in services for Kansan youth. I recommend that you pass this bill for these reasons.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Howe
Johnson County District Attorney

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