DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS • ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
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Representative Bob Lewis, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Steven Stonehouse, and I am the Director of the Sedgwick County Department of Corrections. Our department operates juvenile and adult programs aimed at reducing recidivism and enhancing public safety.

I am here to testify in support of House Bill 2329. In 2016, Senate Bill 367 introduced significant changes to the juvenile justice system in Kansas. In Sedgwick County, we have observed a reduction in youth involvement at all stages of the juvenile justice system, including intakes at the Juvenile Intake and Assessment Center, youth in detention, youth on intensive probation, and youth committed to the Juvenile Correctional Facility. SB 367 encourages the adoption of Evidence-Based Practices and funds these efforts through the Juvenile Justice Oversight Committee. Additionally, SB 367 limits the time a youth may spend in a juvenile detention facility and restricts overall case lengths. These are primarily positive changes.

However, one significant negative change resulting from SB 367 was the elimination of out-of-home placements through a juvenile offender court case. If a juvenile offender requires such placement but not a commitment to a Juvenile Correctional Facility, they are referred to DCF for a child in need of care placement. This has negatively impacted the foster care system and removed a level of accountability and services for juvenile offenders.

We advocate for small, regional, community-based programs focused on addressing youths' criminogenic needs and risks, similar to the Missouri Model of juvenile justice (Summary attached.). We do not support a return to the former child welfare model of out-of-home placements. To be effective and reduce recidivism, placements must be close to the youths' homes with parental involvement and be treatment-based to help youth develop academic and vocational skills and address the causes of criminal behavior.

We believe that a limited, focused use of well-designed, correctional based out-of-home placements will benefit youth, families and communities in Kansas. If provided with this sentencing option, courts could divert youth from the juvenile correctional facility or foster care system. Furthermore, this sentencing option could afford the court another option for rehabilitation and accountability instead of simply closing cases without meaningful behavior and/or cognitive changes.