Opposition to HB 2480

Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to HB 2480.

At its core, this bill proposes a policy shift that accommodates the needs of defense teams while asking victims to absorb the risk. That is a choice. It is not a constitutional requirement. It is not a necessity of due process. And it is not aligned with the public expectation of licensed social workers.

Since 2001, when social workers became mandatory reporters in Kansas and many other states, the purpose has been clear. These professionals are trained to see what others miss. They enter homes, institutions, and family systems where abuse and neglect often go undisclosed. Mandatory reporting exists not because abuse is rare, but because it is persistent, hidden, and often repeated.

Despite mandatory reporting, abuse of children and the elderly has increased over the past two decades. Reports of child abuse have risen alongside greater awareness of trauma and coercion. Elder abuse has grown even faster, driven by isolation, dependency, and an aging population. These increases do not suggest that mandatory reporting has failed. They demonstrate how widespread and entrenched abuse remains, even with safeguards in place.

HB 2480 does not respond to this reality by strengthening protections. Instead, it creates a carve-out where licensed social workers are asked to suspend their duty to report when serving a defense function. This policy does not eliminate abuse. It only reduces the likelihood that abuse will be identified and reported when it is encountered.

Supporters of this bill frame the issue as a conflict between defense advocacy and professional ethics. That framing ignores a critical fact. Social workers are not neutral technicians. They are licensed by the state because the public expects them to act when they encounter harm. That expectation does not change based on who employs them or which team they serve.

The Constitution protects the right to counsel. It does not protect a philosophy of defense that depends on silence from professionals trained to recognize abuse. Attorneys already have attorney client privilege. That privilege is robust and intentional. Extending silence to other licensed professionals is not constitutionally required. It is a policy choice that shifts risk from defense teams to victims.

When a policy change consistently benefits one group while increasing risk to another, we should be honest about who is being accommodated. HB 2480 accommodates defense strategy, institutional convenience, and professional comfort. It does so at the expense of children, elderly adults, and dependent individuals whose safety depends on timely reporting.

Mandatory reporting is not about punishment. It is about intervention. It is about recognizing that abuse often continues until someone with authority acts. Weakening that duty in any setting where social workers operate creates blind spots that victims cannot afford.

Kansas has long recognized that protecting vulnerable populations is a core responsibility of the state. Preserving mandatory reporting for licensed social workers regardless of setting honors that responsibility. Creating carve-outs undermines it.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose HB 2480.

Thank you for your consideration.

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