

March 6, 2025

TESTIMONY OF Frances Dewell
Opponent – Senate Bill 256

To: Senate Government Efficiency Committee

Chairperson Erickson, Members of the Committee,

Hello I am Frances Dewell, one of the Assistant Program Administrators for the Kansas Protection Report Center and I am in opposition of this bill.

The Kansas Protection report center will stand to lose at minimum 25% of our workforce should SB 256 pass. PRC has 76 specialists trained to process reports. A 25% percent deduction along with at least an additional 10 to 15% of staff being gone for trainings, appts, vacations would leave 30 specialists to be divided into 3 reporting methods of webs, faxes and phone calls. PRC processes a monthly average of 7653 reports between the three methods, while using at least a half dozen antiquated computer systems. This will lead to longer wait times for reporters calling to make their reports, and untimely web and fax reports. This will jeopardize the safety of children and adults in Kansas. Report timeliness will not be met, due to inadequate amounts of staff available to process reports.

This is a primary point noted in Fiscal Note for SB 256, “The Department indicates this limitation could affect recruitment and retention of employees because the flexibility to work remotely is an important aspect of employment to potential candidates and current employees. The Department states that its hiring efforts could be impeded due to the state not being able to offer remote-work options to employees and candidates choosing to work at a competing employer who may still offer remote work options. The Department states it is unable to estimate a precise fiscal effect. However, it notes that if enactment of the bill reduced the number of employees it can attract and retain, it could affect the Department’s ability to provide services. The Department further notes it could have to offer higher salaries to attract qualified candidates for positions that cannot be filled as a result of the inability to work remotely.”

In 2023 PRC suffered from a 25% vacancy rate. This, paired along with having additional staff out due to vacations, appointments, and sickness led to PRC not meeting our federally mandated timelines.

Applicants were required to reside within 1 hour from a PRC centralized site, eg., Topeka, Wichita or Kansas City. Due to this requirement PRC struggled to fill positions. By expanding hiring statewide this allowed potential hires to reside in a location, hours away from a PRC centralized site.

PRC resolved it’s 25% vacancy rate to now having open only 1 to 2 positions. This has also resolved our former issue of not meeting federally mandated timelines.

PRC has created a virtual work culture that has been successful since the beginning of COVID. In this culture, communication and collaboration opens opportunities for growth, as well as a sense of belonging, and prioritizes employee wellbeing.

Yes, we could return to a pre-COVID office setting. However, the changes that have developed over the last 5 years have compelled us to evolve. We are meeting the obligations of our stakeholders, while continuing to provide the services needed for vulnerable Kansans.

Please listen to the voices of Kansas workers who provide essential services while successfully teleworking from home. I request that you carefully consider my testimony and reject SB 256.