

Serena Casteneda, LBSW
785-207-2707
Wecker.Serena@gmail.com

Kansas Committee on Government Efficiency: Senators Renee Erickson, Michael Murphy, Cindy Holscher, Larry Alley, Rick Billinger, Patrick Schmidt, Doug Shane, Adam Thomas, and Mike Thompson

Dear Kansas Committee on Government Efficiency:

I am writing in reference to my concerns and opposition of SB 256. I am a resident of Lyndon, KS in Osage County and have been employed with the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) from 2004-2008 and 2010 through current, a total of 19 years. I am a licensed social worker and a dedicated public servant in Prevention and Protection Services. If SB 256 was enacted, this would create unnecessary obstacles to the recruitment, retention, and well-being of DCF staff.

In a previous role as a supervisor in the Kansas Protection Report Center (PRC), which is based out of Kansas City, Topeka and Wichita, we were chronically understaffed and unable to meet timelines. As a result of the telework option, we have a greater candidate pool as we are attracting applicants outside of the major metropolitan areas. Currently, PRC staff live all over Kansas and in neighboring states. PRC is at nearly full staffing levels, experiencing lower turnover rates, and staff have demonstrated increased productivity. PRC is consistently meeting timelines which directly impacts the safety of children and vulnerable adults in Kansas. A return-to-work mandate would result in loss of staff who are not living near a DCF office. Regional offices in many locations do not have the space or capacity to house PRC staff. A return-to-work mandate will have a significant, detrimental impact to staffing at PRC.

In my current role as a Student Services Supervisor in the Kansas City Region, I am responsible for recruiting student interns and supporting students in their skill development with the goal of increasing the workforce in Prevention and Protection Services, primarily Adult Protection and Child Protection. When in attendance at college internship and careers fairs, graduating students regularly inquire about telework options within DCF and view hybrid telework as an incentive to apply with our agency. Adult and Child Protection employees work in the office most of the week as they are making home visits and conducting interviews in the community. The hybrid telework option allows for staff to complete "traditional" office work from their home, such as documentation and phone calls. Employees look forward to telework days or partial days to focus on productivity while also attending to their emotional and mental well-being in this high burn-out field. I fear that eliminating the telework option will drive our overworked protection staff to seek out alternative employment. Vulnerable Kansans deserve a workforce that is operating at their best capacity.

I appreciate your time and consideration of my concerns for SB 256.

Sincerely,

Serena Casteneda

Serena Casteneda, LBSW
DCF Student Services Supervisor