

**March 6, 2025**

Testimony of Amanda Bain Wysocki, LBSW

Opponent - Senate Bill 256

To: Senate Government Efficiency Committee

Chairperson Erickson, Members of the Committee,

My name is Amanda Bain Wysocki. Although I am a resident of the state of Missouri, I have been an employee of the Department for Children and Families since March 2019. I started my state career as a child protection specialist in the Overland Park office. In November 2019, I transitioned to a position as a protection specialist for the Kansas City office of the Protection Report Center (something you may know as the child and elder abuse and neglect hotline). In October 2022, I was promoted to a supervisor position for the PRC, although my location is officially now the Topeka office. The PRC has been operating as an almost entirely remote branch since May 2020, and it has been life changing for myself and many of our diligent workers. We do still have office space for those who prefer to work in an office, and we have several people who exercise that choice. We have also established systems where if we have concerns for a worker's productivity, they are no longer allowed to telework. I am offering testimony today on behalf of both myself and my team to urge you to vote against Senate Bill 256.

I will start with myself. In June 2022, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. This is frequently confused with degenerative arthritis, which is common with a more elderly population. I was 32 when I was diagnosed. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune condition where my immune system thinks that infections are attacking my joints, so it causes them to become inflamed. When I am in the middle of an RA flare, it is nearly impossible for me to use my hands. I cannot do things like turn on faucets, open medicine bottles, or even bend my hands to be able to type. It is debilitating and can cause me to miss work. I am extremely fortunate to have a great primary care physician who was able to figure out almost immediately what was wrong and what specialists I needed to see. My condition is now largely controlled by medication and my flares are not nearly as debilitating. The problem is that the only way to keep my condition in check is to take medication which suppresses my immune system. That means that, to borrow a phrase from my grandmother, my immune system is about as useful as a screen door in a hurricane. If someone near me has a cold or the flu or a sore throat, I am extremely likely to pick up germs from them. Working in a crowded office setting would mean that I would be sick constantly. And when I do get sick, it can take me weeks to kick a bug that other people might get over in a couple days. To give my immune system a chance to rebound, I have to stop taking my arthritis medication for a couple of weeks, which can sometimes trigger a flare. It's an endless cycle, but it is just my life and I make things work. Working from home allows me to keep myself safe, and it also means that I do not have to call in sick as frequently when I am sick. There are absolutely still days where I am simply too sick to work. That would be the case for someone with a stronger immune system than me. I just don't have to worry that working through sickness will get someone else sick, and I don't have to worry that someone else working through sickness will get me sick. I know I am not the only state employee with an autoimmune condition like this.

Now, I would like to focus on the ways that telework has improved the lives of the Protection Report Center as a whole. When I started with PRC, we had a revolving door of employees. Our work is hard. It

is essentially a call center setting where we listen to people's trauma for 40 hours a week. My training cohort had five people in it. Two of them didn't make it to the end of training. One left within six months. One lasted a couple years, then left and has since come back. And then there was me. To help cover vacant positions, we offered a lot of voluntary overtime, especially to cover our weekend staff. The thing about PRC is we run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. If someone needs to report abuse at 3 am on Christmas morning, we will have someone there. When I was a protection specialist, I took a lot of that overtime. I worked 50 hours a week for a lot of weeks. I worked weekends and more than my required number of holidays. I was exhausted and very close to burning out. When I became a supervisor, PRC was operating at about 20-23% vacancies. With us being so short-staffed, our existing staff was exhausted. They couldn't keep up with the volume of reports that were coming in. They were calling in sick more often because they were so exhausted. And we lost a lot of good people because conditions were so bad.

Then, thanks to the fact we were teleworking, we were able to expand our hiring pool to more than just workers located right nearby one of our three office locations in Kansas City, Topeka, or Wichita. We worked diligently at recruiting people and we now have less than 10% of our spots vacant. I haven't had to hire a new protection specialist in nearly a year because my unit is full. And I have an amazing team that consists of people in Topeka, Lawrence, Wichita, and Emporia. Between the eight protection specialists that I supervise, they have over 70 years of experience in child or adult welfare. My unit is not unique in this. We have been able to staff PRC with diligent and experienced professionals. We have seen massive success. In the past, we have been put on Performance Improvement Plans by our federal funders for our timeliness rates. We are supposed to have 95% of our reports screened by their given deadlines. For this fiscal year, we are above that threshold. I owe this entirely to the fact we are able to hire from across the state. The truly frustrating thing about all of this is that there is no reason we need to work out of an office. I talk to my co-workers now through TEAMS and email more than I did when I was sitting in an office. I know how to supervise my team and make sure they are doing what they need to do. I don't need to be hovering over their shoulder to see what they are doing.

I could go on and on about the many reasons that state employees need to have that freedom to telework, but I will just make this final plea. Revoking telework does not just mean that our staff would suffer. It means that citizens across the state of Kansas would suffer. When we lose staff or cannot meet our timeliness goals, it means it takes us longer to get help for children who are being physically and sexually abused. It means that it takes us longer to get help to elderly individuals who are being financially exploited. It means that it takes us longer to get help for that parent whose child has severe behavioral needs. If not for the government employees, please consider that this will only hurt Kansans.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Amanda Bain Wysocki

[amandamwysocki@gmail.com](mailto:amandamwysocki@gmail.com)

816-456-8194