



**Proponent Testimony – HB 2329
Senate Judiciary Committee
January 22, 2026**

Chair Warren, Vice Chair Titus, Ranking Member Corson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony today regarding the HB 2329. My name is Kristalle Hedrick, and I serve as CEO of the Children's Alliance of Kansas, representing private child welfare providers who partner with the state to serve children and families across Kansas.

In 2016, Kansas enacted SB 367, a major juvenile justice reform effort intended to reduce youth incarceration, emphasize community-based responses, limit the use of detention and out of home placement, to keep youth in their homes whenever possible. These goals were well-intended and aligned with national best practices for the time.

Since passage of SB 367, Kansas' child welfare system has experienced several unintended but significant impacts, particularly for crossover youth and families struggling with youth's behavioral needs. As detention and justice-systems responses narrowed youth exhibiting serious or escalating behaviors often remained in the community with minimal intervention. Families, Courts, and law enforcement have turned to DCF and the child welfare system by default, even when abuse or neglect were not the primary concern.

SB 367 reduced reliance on secure detention without a corresponding expansion of intermediate, short-term, or stabilization options. As a result, youth with complex behavioral needs often did not meet criteria for detention, but also could not safely remain in their home.

While SB 367 intended to reduce justice-system costs, it has shifted costs to child welfare, behavioral health, and private providers. This increased reliance on foster care has not only led to increased placement costs but has cost the state millions in terms of liability insurance, turnover of the workforce – practitioners and foster parents, alike. Ultimately, leading to placement instability and longer lengths of stay for all youth experiencing foster care.



HB 2329 recognizes a reality we see every day in our work: many youths who come into contact with the juvenile justice system are also deeply connected to the child welfare system. These crossover youth often present with unmet behavioral health needs, trauma histories, and family instability that – if left unaddressed – can escalate into more serious system involvement.

We support HB 2329 for three key reasons:

First, the bill strengthens prevention efforts for youth exhibiting criminogenic behaviors, before those behaviors result in foster care placements. Too often, families lack timely access to services when a youth's behaviors begin to escalate. Without intervention, the system responds only after a crisis occurs – frequently results in removal from the home or deeper justice involvement. HB 2329 prioritizes earlier, more appropriate responses that stabilize families and reduce unnecessary foster care entries driven by behavior rather than concerns child abuse and neglect.

Second, HB 2329 expands the continuum of care available to crossover youth. Kansas needs a broader range of intervention options that fall between community-based services and more restrictive placements. This bill supports a more flexible continuum that allows youth to receive the right level of care at the right time – particularly youth who present with complex behavioral needs but do not belong in either detention or foster care alone. A stronger continuum improves outcomes who reducing reliance on costly, high-acuity placements.

Third, the bill promotes timely and meaningful consequences for youth who commit violent offenses, while still allowing for rehabilitation. Communities deserve safety, and youth need clear, immediate responses when serious harm occurs. HB 2329 supports accountability that is developmentally appropriate and paired with services that reduce the likelihood of re-offense. This balance approach acknowledges public safety concerns without defaulting responses that can increase long-term system involvement or worsen outcomes.

Since the passage of SB 367, Kansas has made important strides in reducing youth incarceration. However, we have also seen unintended consequences for the child welfare system – particularly for crossover youth and families seeking help for escalating behaviors. HB 2329 builds on the intent of SB 367 by filling gaps in the continuum of care,

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preventing foster care entry by criminogenic behavior, and ensuring timely accountability that supports both public safety and rehabilitation.

On behalf of the Children's Alliance of Kansas and the providers who serve children and families statewide, I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB 2329. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Kansas children and families. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Kristalle Hedrick

A business card for Kristalle Hedrick, LMSW, Chief Executive Officer of Children's Alliance of KANSAS. The card has a dark blue header and footer. The main body is light beige. On the left is a circular photo of Kristalle Hedrick, a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a blue blazer. To the right of the photo, her name and title are listed. Below that are icons for location, phone, email, and website, followed by their respective details. On the right side of the card, there is the Children's Alliance of KANSAS logo and a circular seal that says "CERTIFIED MAPP LEADER". The footer contains the text "Individualization | Relator | Strategic | Futuristic | Responsibility".

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