

OPPONENT TESTIMONY ON HB 2329
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Submitted by: Maximilian Mendoza, CEO/Executive Director, Heartland 180, Inc. (Wyandotte County, Kansas)

Date: January 20, 2026

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Maximilian Mendoza, and I am the CEO/Executive Director of Heartland 180, Inc., a nonprofit serving at-risk and system-involved youth and their families in Wyandotte County. This issue is personal for me—I was a troubled youth who experienced the justice system firsthand, and what changed my life wasn't more confinement; it was a pro-social support system, life skills, and access to community-based services that helped me turn things around.

I respectfully submit opponent testimony on HB 2329 because it would expand detention and placement in ways that will harm Kansas youth, destabilize families, and divert resources away from proven community-based solutions.

HB 2329 would:

- Double cumulative detention time for juveniles from 45 days to 90 days over the life of a case.
- Re-establish group homes without clear eligibility standards tied to risk level, needs, or offense severity.
- Allocate \$10 million per year to group homes—funding that could otherwise strengthen community-based programs that prevent deeper system involvement.
- Require mandatory detention for youth in possession of a firearm (not use), and allow sentencing to a juvenile correctional facility.
- Expand eligibility for juvenile correctional placement from high-risk youth to include moderate-risk youth.

From both lived experience and years of working with Kansas youth, I can tell you: more confinement does not automatically mean more safety. Detention and restrictive placements often interrupt school, increase trauma exposure, and make successful reentry harder—especially when applied broadly or by mandate rather than individualized assessment.

RECOMMENDATIONS (IF THE COMMITTEE MOVES FORWARD)

While we oppose HB 2329, if the Committee considers amendments, we urge you to:

1. Maintain the current cumulative detention cap and avoid policies that increase detention length by default.
2. Reject mandatory detention and preserve judicial discretion, allowing courts to consider context, risk, and appropriate alternatives.
3. If group homes are considered, add strict guardrails: narrow eligibility, time limits, required treatment standards, independent oversight, and outcome reporting.
4. Do not expand correctional placement to moderate-risk youth; reserve the most restrictive placements for the highest-risk cases and prioritize community-based interventions for others.

5. Protect and prioritize funding for community-based programs that reduce recidivism and keep youth connected to school and family.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose HB 2329.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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