



Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 2329

To: The Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Marquetta Atkins-Woods

Date: January 22nd, 2026

Subject: Defending SB 367, Fiscal Responsibility, and Kansas Families

My name is **Marquetta Atkins-Woods**, the founder and Executive Director of **Destination Innovation Inc** and I submit this written testimony in opposition to Kansas HB 2329.

A key provision of this bill proposes redirecting **\$10 million annually to group homes**, drawing funds away from **community-based programs that are specifically designed to prevent young people from entering the justice system**. This shift represents not only a philosophical misalignment, but a fiscally unsound strategy that contradicts decades of evidence about what actually reduces system involvement, long-term public cost, and harm to communities.

**Prevention is the most fiscally responsible investment we can make.**

Community-based prevention programs operate at a fraction of the cost of institutional or congregate care settings. When we remove funding from prevention, we are not saving money—we are **deferring cost**. That cost reappears later in the form of detention, court involvement, emergency services, group home placements, and long-term adult system involvement. Every stage of that pipeline is exponentially more expensive than early intervention and community-based support.

Redirecting funds toward group homes increases reliance on reactive systems that engage youth **after** harm has already occurred, rather than addressing root causes such as unmet mental health needs, family instability, educational disruption, and lack of economic opportunity. This approach creates a revolving door: youth exit one system only to reenter another, often with deeper trauma and fewer supports.

All roads for youth should not lead to incarceration—or incarceration-adjacent systems.

Community-based programs prevent system involvement by design. They provide accountability rooted in relationship, culturally responsive care, and individualized pathways that stabilize young people and families before crisis escalates. These programs reduce recidivism, increase school engagement, and strengthen community safety—outcomes that directly benefit taxpayers and reduce long-term state expenditures.

Young people's lives are always bigger than the boxes we try to put them in.



Overinvestment in group homes without proportional investment in prevention risks expanding systems of containment rather than healing. History has shown that when institutional placements grow, they tend to fill available beds regardless of whether placement is necessary. This dynamic increases state costs while weakening community capacity. Communities doing effective prevention work lose resources, while punitive systems expand—without producing better outcomes.

We should be funding **healing, prevention, and support—not containment.**

From a fiscal standpoint, this bill moves Kansas in the wrong direction. It prioritizes short-term optics over long-term impact and increases the likelihood of higher correctional, healthcare, and social service costs in future budgets. Kansas has already seen that system expansion does not equal public safety. What improves safety—and reduces cost—is sustained investment in community-based solutions that interrupt harm before it occurs.

We must also acknowledge that policies like HB 2329 risk positioning youth as the problem rather than examining the systemic failures that precede their involvement. When we disinvest from prevention and then increase funding for containment, we effectively ask young people to bear the financial and social consequences of policy choices that failed to support them early on. This is neither equitable nor economically responsible.

Applying band-aids to deep wounds has not worked in the past, and it will not work now.

Kansas has an opportunity to make a smarter investment—one that aligns public dollars with evidence-based outcomes. Protecting and strengthening community-based prevention funding is not only the moral choice; it is the **most cost-effective and sustainable path forward.**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose HB 2329 and to preserve funding for the community-based programs that keep young people out of incarceration, stabilize families, and reduce long-term costs to the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
**Marquette Atkins-Woods**