



STATE OF KANSAS

Tenth Judicial District

OFFICE OF DISTRICT ATTORNEY

STEPHEN M. HOWE, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

January 21, 2026

To: Chairwoman Kellie Warren and the Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: House Bill 2329 – Proponent Testimony

From: Steve Howe, Johnson County District Attorney

Chairwoman Kellie Warren and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 2329.

This bill seeks to provide options for high-risk juvenile offenders which were taken away during the 2017 Juvenile Justice reforms. At that time many prosecutors and probation officers warned of the consequences of closing the youth residential facility which were commonly referred to as group homes. These residential facilities provided a middle ground between the corrections facility and sending a juvenile back home. Many of these juveniles needed a level of care that could not be provided by remaining in their home environment. These group homes provided training and education needed for youth experiencing behavioral and or substance abuse issues. The youth residential facilities were used for high- risk offenders who have multiple convictions or multiple and serious behavioral issues while on supervision. At some point in time families would or could no longer handle the behavioral issues, these facilities provided us an option other than incarceration. These facilities were vital for changing behavior and protecting the community. Especially in many of our rural jurisdictions that had few if any resources to offer these troubled youth.

When we passed SB 367 the well-intended goal was to take the money saved from running the youth residential facilities and reinvest the money back into the local community resources. Even though Johnson County has the largest population in the State and the greatest opportunity for counseling and therapy resources, allocating those resources as imagined has been difficult and challenging. In our rural communities these at home resources are rare and unavailable to many Kansans. This reality was discussed in 2017 and having one facility to handle these high-risk youth is a resource needed in our juvenile justice system.

If you are to approve of these changes I would ask you add some additional language to the bill. The Evidence Based Program Account (EBPA) by law is to be used for home based services. You would need to add "youth residential facility" to the list of potential resources earmarked for these funds.

Reinstituting a youth residential facility option gives us another tool in our tool belt to correct behavior for some of most challenging at risk youth. This small step could close a vital hole in services for Kansan youth. I recommend that you pass this bill for these reasons.

Sincerely,



Stephen M. Howe
Johnson County District Attorney