



Proponent Testimony for SB 414
Senate Committee on Judiciary
February 3, 2026

Chair Warren, Vice Chair Titus, Ranking Member Corson, and Members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 414.

I am Gina Meier-Hummel. I am in my 33rd year of serving at-risk Kansas families. I hold a master's degree in both Clinical and Administrative Social Work from the University of Kansas. I have spent my career working both in public child welfare and in nonprofit management. I am the former Secretary for the Kansas Department of Children and Families (DCF), a former Commissioner for Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), and a former Deputy Director for Victim Services for the Kansas Attorney General's office, and now I am in my seventh year of servicing as the Executive Director of O'Connell Children's Shelter. I am also an Adjunct Professor of Social Work at Washburn University.

O'Connell Children's Shelter is nearing its 50th year of service to Kansas children and families. Mrs. O'Connell donated the 120 acres upon which the ranch sits today in Southeast Lawrence. Insightfully nearly five decades ago, Mrs. O'Connell was worried about young men ending up incarcerated and created O'Connell Youth Ranch (OYR) in the hopes that young people who needed assistance would have stability and a safe place to go. She had great foresight to see the importance of structure, consistency, and accountability in a safe, home-like environment when it comes to effectively intervening with youth.

Several years later, leaders in the Lawrence community recognized that OYR alone could not address all the needs of at-risk youth, and The Children's Shelter (TCS) was created in 1981 and developed numerous services including prevention programs. In 2021, OYR and TCS merged to become O'Connell Children's Shelter (OCS). Today, OCS is CARF-accredited, offering QRTP, Emergency Placement, Respite Placement, and Child Placing Agency services, and support to foster families and kin. Our five homes (three on the ranch property and two in the city) have the capacity to provide care for

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nearly 60 youth at any one time. OCS is in the process of building and preparing to stand up a three-bed Juvenile Crisis Intervention Center (JCIC) facility this summer and are facing the reality that the JCIC regulations are cost prohibitive to this effort. We estimate to run the beds as the regulations are written will result in over a \$300,000 shortfall each year. There is a reason that in the over five years since the JCIC regulations were promulgated, hardly anyone has answered the call to open a facility.

OCS strongly supports this legislation, which would authorize funding from the state's Evidence-Based Programs Account to be used for licensed residential facilities providing behavioral health crisis intervention services to juveniles. SB 414 authorizes funding for facilities to offer short-term observation, assessment, treatment, case planning, and referrals for juveniles in crisis, including access to medical, psychiatric, psychological, social, educational, and substance abuse-related services. This opening up of funding to such licensed residential facilities would strengthen supports and help create a variety of treatment options for youth experiencing behavioral health crises. It is consistent with the calls to expand community-based and crisis intervention services, so families have meaningful options beyond detention and traditional institutional placement. It would also allow services that would meet youth where they are and provide timely and appropriate supports. By expanding the funding flexibility for crisis intervention and residential mental health treatment, SB 414 aids in creating the kind of comprehensive array of services that children and families so desperately need and deserve as it makes progress in creating the statewide continuum of care for youth with behavioral health needs. SB 414 would also allow residential facilities to operate and offer expanded behavioral health interventions without taking on the cost-prohibitive burden of the extensive JCIC regulations.

I am happy to speak with any of you at any time regarding this and thank you for your work on behalf of Kansans.

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