



*We all need connection.*

**Proponent Testimony on HB2021  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
March 8, 2023**

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**Chair Warren, Vice Chair Wilborn, Ranking Member Corson, and Members of the Committee:**

My name is Angela Hedrick, LPC, and I serve as Vice President of Operations of the nonprofit KVC Kansas. Our KVC team appreciates the opportunity to be the state's foster care case management provider in two of the eight catchment areas.

KVC Kansas is the state's foster care case management provider for:

- Area 6 (Kansas City & Lawrence areas)
- Area 3 (Topeka and NEK)

We also serve as the state's largest Child Placing Agency, sponsoring 25% of Kansas foster homes.

Challenges of Serving Cross-Over Youth within the Foster Care System

Senate Bill 367 was intended to positively impact families and the development of youth in our communities by shifting juveniles from detention to treatment and it directly led to a 63% drop in youth confinement. Unfortunately, SB 367's intended positive impact was hindered because resources never shifted to preventative, community-based treatment. As fewer low-risk juveniles are incarcerated, many transfer to the child welfare system (Department of Children and Families) instead of community care as mandated by SB 367. Without adequate treatment options, juveniles who were originally considered low-risk often escalate in their behaviors and become moderate- to high-risk offenders. Additionally, they often target other juveniles, some of whom are in out-of-home care due to abuse and neglect, to participate in dangerous, criminogenic behavior with them and/or victimize vulnerable youth.

There are available funds that should be reinvested in prevention and treatment, including \$6 million for juvenile crisis centers that have yet to be utilized. Child welfare stakeholders must be included in the planning process. Investing in evidence-based, community treatment options that can support youth and make sure they remain in their home environment when they have a safe caregiver is vital to ensuring the original intentions of SB 367 come to fruition. In situations where foster care becomes

unavoidable, these treatment options also aid in stabilizing their complex needs. HB 2021 provides a path for these improvements.

Out of all youth in foster care statewide, 11% are youth referred due to significant child behavior problems that historically would have been served through the juvenile justice system and not foster care. These children are not entering foster care due to abuse or neglect, yet are placed in settings with children who have tragically endured abuse, neglect and other traumas. We are expecting foster parents, trained to care for youth who have experienced abuse and neglect, to also care for youth with extensive criminogenic behaviors with no added training or support within the system or our communities. This impacts safety within foster homes and leaves caregivers feeling helpless with a lack of treatment options to hold youth accountable for their actions.

Foster care is designed for children who are victims of abuse, neglect or other family challenges. It cannot support juvenile offenders without a large infusion of resources for community-based mental health services, emergency beds and psychiatric residential treatment facility beds (PRTFs), specialized foster parent recruitment and training, and more. Due to lack of available placements and community services, there is a group of Kansas youth who must move placements nearly every single day. In a single 90-day period, from September 1 to November 30, 2022, 175 youth with criminogenic behaviors experienced multiple placements. This placement instability causes further trauma as youth are unable to form connections with caregivers and peers as well as receive adequate, timely services. Youth would be better served in their own families with in-home treatment, as well as access to support that could be offered through juvenile justice crisis intervention centers.

There have been several serious safety incidents due to the transfer of youth from the juvenile justice system to the child welfare system. These include children and adults being assaulted, significant property damage, and additional arrests and charges for crossover youth. This contributes to child welfare staff turnover and diminished outcomes. These serious safety incidents also impact foster homes and have contributed to a steady decline in the number of foster homes across the state. In 2022, the number of licensed foster homes in the state decreased by 9.8%.

### Management of Complex Needs and Opportunities for Systemic Improvement

In managing the needs of high acuity youth with complex needs, KVC routinely coordinates with treatment providers and families to develop a care plan. We have our own Outpatient department that provides assessment, therapy and medication management. Outpatient staff are trained to understand the unique needs of children in foster care with complex developmental trauma and other behavioral health disorders. This team also screens all children entering care to identify behavioral health needs at the outset to ensure timely access to treatment. Our Child Placing Agency (CPA) employs dedicated foster parent trainers and foster family therapists who support families in caring for youth with complex needs. In 2018, KVC created a new youth QRTP to open more treatment options for youth needing intensive residential treatment. While all these efforts contribute to our safety outcomes, additional systemic changes

and resources are needed to support increased placement stability, timely permanency, and the overall wellbeing and trajectory of life for such high acuity youth.

HB 2021 is an important step toward systemic change to improve child safety, public safety and child wellbeing.

Specifically, HB 2021:

- **Removes inter-agency barriers** to accessing services for children and youth by ensuring that all children, regardless of whether they are placed in foster care, receive juvenile offender services for which they might be eligible.
- **Ensures that the data systems necessary to coordinate care** for youth and to support reviewing evidence-based programs will be developed and implemented. After five years of working with juvenile justice youth within the child welfare system, it is vital for us to have data systems that ensure we can coordinate care and communicate critical information related to child safety and wellbeing.
- **Ensures extended case length limits to help children access needed support.** Currently, simply enrolling in an intervention or treatment service can take weeks or longer – during which time case length time limits are expiring. HB 2021 increases the likelihood that children will have adequate opportunity to receive and benefit from the interventions intended to improve their wellbeing. This improvement can either help a youth avoid foster care altogether or improve outcomes for a youth while in foster care.
- **Expands the ability of nonprofit organizations to develop effective interventions for children and their families.** As a child welfare provider, KVC and the other Child Welfare Case Management Providers in the state are now essential providers for the most challenging cohort of youth whose behaviors are not severe enough for detention, but who are also not safe at home without additional supports. HB 2021 would ensure that local community providers have access to critical funds intended and needed to support these youth and their families. We ask that you support HB 2021 to improve care and services for children and families in Kansas.

While child welfare systems are complex, they are a necessary service to help strengthen families and ensure children are safe and healthy. When determined to be a necessary intervention due to safety concerns, we need to ensure adequate funding and resources are infused into the system to stabilize children and families and reunify them as quickly as possible.

On behalf of KVC Kansas, thank you for the opportunity to share our experiences and expertise with you today.