

Testimony on SB367
To
The Senate Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

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I thank you for the opportunity today to testify in support of SB367 and the recommendations made by the Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup. As you will undoubtedly hear from many organizations and individuals in favor of this bill, I will limit my testimony to a few key components.

First, the Juvenile Justice Workgroup recommendations incorporated in SB367 represent the only comprehensive assessment of the Kansas juvenile justice system since the mid 1990's. That is not to say the system has not changed. Many of us have contributed to important improvements in the justice system in the past two decades. Those improvements happen as a need is identified and usually impact a portion of the system or the practices of a few individuals or organizations. All too often such improvements have a limited, or no, impact on statewide practices, and may not include a diverse representation of juvenile justice stakeholders.

As a member of the Juvenile Justice Workgroup, I can share with you that the membership was representative of the major decision making groups in our juvenile justice system and sought input across the system. We conducted over two dozen roundtable discussions across the state with key system stakeholders including: judges, law enforcement, crime victims and victims' advocates, prosecutors, educators, Juvenile Intake and Assessment Services (JIAS) staff, diversion staff, Community Corrections, Court Services, Juvenile Correctional Facility (JCF) staff, YRCII staff, Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) staff, service providers, juvenile offenders, youth found to be Children in Need of Care—Non-Abuse and Neglect (CINC-NAN), youth advocates, and parents and families. In addition Staff from KDOC, DCF, Court Services, the judiciary, the legislature, and other agencies also provided information through interviews and surveys were conducted of Court Services Officers (CSOs) and Community Corrections Officers (CCOs), gathering 99 CSO responses from 23 judicial districts and 155 CCO responses from 83 counties.

In summary, the product before you in SB367 is representative of the input of all of these stakeholder groups. As you hear from proponents and opponents to this legislation, I ask of you to keep in mind the input from this process and weigh that appropriately with input of some individuals or some groups.

Next, I would like to comment toward the use of residential placements. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) periodically conduct a point in time census of juveniles in residential placement across the country. In the most recent data from 2013, Kansas has the 6th highest rate among the 50 states and Washington D.C. of youth in residential placement at 278 per 100,000 youth. We cannot continue with a legal system which contributes to this overreliance on residential placement and to expend the people's limited resources to support this practice.

If enacted together, the policy recommendations in SB367 are projected to reduce the average daily out of home population by at least 62 percent from projected levels by 2021. If all things remained constant, which is highly unlikely given reforms and improvements happening in other states, Kansas would rank 42nd after implementing these new policies. For comparison purposes, currently the Kansas adult prison population ranks 36th in the nation. I offer to this committee that such a ranking would be more consistent with our Kansas values and the goals of our juvenile justice code (K.S.A. 38-2301). That code as you may recall, specifies three primary goals: to promote public safety, hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior, and improve their ability to live more productively and responsibly in the community. In part, this code further states that to accomplish these goals juvenile justice policies shall be designed to recognize that the ultimate solutions to juvenile crime lie in strengthening families, be community based to the greatest extent possible, and be family centered when appropriate.

This legislation presents an opportunity to reinvest our resources into practices and programs that align with the values of our citizens and our laws.

Finally, I would like to offer that these policies have been developed to work together, and that reinvestment of existing resources is a key to the success of these policies and to improving the safety of our public. I trust that improving public safety is a goal we all share, and commit to you that I, and our team in KDOC Juvenile Services, will do the work necessary to implement these changes when they become law.

I thank you for this opportunity, and am happy to stand for any questions.