

Testimony on SB367 to
The Senate Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

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I am here today to testify in support of SB367 and in support of the recommendations made by the Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup.

SB367 incorporates the 40 recommendations of the Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup which was comprised of system stakeholders across the state. It amends the code resulting in system improvements on a number of fronts including intake and diversion practices, modifications to the juvenile correctional matrix so as to reserve that placement option for youth who pose the greatest public safety risks, sets expectations about use of a system-wide validated risk/needs assessment tool, increases data collection and data sharing, reduces our over-reliance on costly (and largely ineffective) out of home placements, establishes requirements for training for those serving juveniles, and establishes an oversight committee to monitor implementation of policy changes. It establishes a Juvenile Justice Improvement Fund and sets forth the reinvestment of the averted costs to evidence-based programming (EBP) in the community designed to address criminogenic needs of youth and reduce their likelihood to reoffend.

Tools at our disposal should be used to guide decisions to produce consistent and effective treatment and management of youth involved in the juvenile justice system across the state. We are fortunate that we don't have a large percentage of high risk youth in Kansas. We know that providing intensive services to those of low risk actually increases an offender's risk to re-offend and creates more crime victims. One of the Kansas data trends the workgroup was able to review was the increase in the proportion of misdemeanor offenses in our system and a decrease in felony offenses. Despite this, our length of probation and custody placements over the same period is actually increasing.

KDOC has implemented pilot community-based EBP and has done so successfully. Currently such services are only provided in limited areas. Unfortunately, Kansas also subjects some youth to inappropriate and much more expensive programs and placements that increase recidivism and decrease public safety. Beyond the lack of standardization of programming in communities, other opportunities are not consistently available for youth in the juvenile justice system in Kansas. For example, youth in many communities do not have access to diversion opportunities. In some communities diversion programs are cost-prohibitive for families or vary significantly in length and content. This bill provides for the reinvestment of funds to be used for more consistent, comprehensive, statewide services to be available to youth regardless of geography.

The department urges favorable consideration for SB367.