

February 1, 2016

Shannon Cotsoradis, President & CEO  
Kansas Action for Children  
Testimony for SB 367  
Senate Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

Kansas Action for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to shaping health, education and economic policy that improves the lives of Kansas children and families. On behalf of incarcerated Kansas kids now and in the future, we support the recommended reforms to Kansas' juvenile justice system in SB 367.

**Too many Kansas kids are exposed to lengthy stays in youth prison.**

The vast majority of Kansas youth in prison are low- or moderate-risk offenders.<sup>i</sup> On average, Kansas kids are sent to out-of-home placements for 14 months.<sup>ii</sup> *Sending these youth to out-of-home placements for lengthy periods of time does not reduce the chances of re-offending.* Youth entering the juvenile justice system need community-based alternatives to out-of-home placements or incarceration.

**Local, family-based alternatives are better for reducing future offenses.**

Keeping juvenile offenders in their community is the most successful way to get these kids back on track. Though incarcerating kids outside of their communities is not effective it is still often used as a first-resort in our juvenile justice system. By keeping youth at home, community rehabilitation programs can focus on problems in a youth's family and peer groups, while simultaneously concentrating on the youth's own behavior and risks.<sup>iii</sup> *Here in Kansas, we've seen some early success with local alternatives.* Wyandotte County adopted an intensive program known as Multi-Systemic Therapy in 2013 and has been able to reduce out-of-home placements by one-fourth.<sup>iv</sup>

**Reforms included in this legislation have been proven to work elsewhere.**

*Other states have enacted similar reforms and they have proven effective.* Kansas will not be the first to use many of the reforms included in the legislation; other states adopting similar reforms continue to see reductions in youth offenses and reinvestment in more effective strategies. Reforms comparable to those in this legislation have shown to reduce recidivism and re-offense rates in states from Ohio to Texas.<sup>v</sup> Kansas has the advantage of using evidence-based and proven models for reforming the juvenile justice system to get better results, all while making sure the adopted reforms suit the specific needs of Kansas.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the committee members adopt the reforms to Kansas' juvenile justice system as recommended by the Juvenile Justice Workgroup and included in SB 367.



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<sup>i</sup> "Kansas State DMC Assessment." U.S. Department of Justice, 2013.

<sup>ii</sup> Presentation to Kansas interbranch Juvenile Justice Workgroup. Pew Charitable Trusts, August 2015.

<sup>iii</sup> "Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach." National Research Council, 2013.

<sup>iv</sup> "Kansas Juvenile Justice Trends: Report to Kansas Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight." Kansas Department of Corrections, October 2014.

<sup>v</sup> "Re-Examining Juvenile Incarceration: High Cost, Poor Outcomes Spark Shift to Alternatives." Pew Charitable Trusts, April 2015.