

Testimony in Support of Kansas Senate Bill 367
Submitted by Anne K. Seymour
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I welcome the opportunity to offer my strong support for the passage of Senate Bill 367. I offer my testimony as a national crime victim advocate with 32 years of experience in my field (much of which has involved victim-related public policy and awareness work in Kansas); as someone who has developed national policies and protocols for the U.S. Department of Justice that promote victims' rights and services throughout the juvenile justice system; and as a family member of both victims of juvenile offenders and an adjudicated juvenile offender.

I was privileged to co-facilitate the Victim/Survivor/Advocate Roundtable with Senator Greg Smith that was sponsored in October 2015 by the Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup. Senator Smith is recognized as a legislator and victim/survivor for whom victims' rights and services are a priority in his work and in his life. His personal commitment to the concerns and needs of victims of juvenile offenders in Kansas is reflected throughout SB 367.

Too often, public policy that seeks to reform the juvenile justice system fails to seek or incorporate the concerns of crime victims and those who serve them. The Workgroup's proactive outreach to survivors and their advocates helped ensure that victims' voices were heard – loud and clear.

SB 367 is holistic and comprehensive, its language is victim-centered and validates the important role that victims of juvenile offenders – upon whom we rely to report juvenile crimes and serve as witnesses – have in Kansas' juvenile justice system. Kansas has already done much to recognize the critical role of victims' in the juvenile justice system – this bill goes even further. The VSA Roundtable identified the fact that “many juveniles who enter the system in Kansas have personal histories of acute or chronic trauma,” and SB 367 recognizes and offers critical protective provisions for youth who have endured such abuse.

Over the past three decades, many victims of juvenile offenders have said to me that, while *they can't change what happened to them*, they *can* work to prevent others from being victimized. Across our Nation, these victims have become active in juvenile justice programming to help youthful offenders understand victim and community impact; to be provided with services and support that address what is too often their

own history of victimization and/or trauma; and to participate in programming that can help them refrain from juvenile delinquency in the future.

The emphasis of the Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup and SB 367 on promoting the safety of individuals and communities and holding youthful offenders accountable is very important to crime survivors and victim advocates in Kansas. What is *equally important* is this Bill's use of evidence-based tools and programming that have been proven to be effective and have positive results in reducing recidivism of youthful offenders in other states' juvenile justice systems. For example:

- I am a strong supporter of evidence-based risk and needs assessments of youth that can determine their likelihood to appear in court or to re-offend prior to adjudication. When we apply science to juvenile justice, the outcomes are positive for adjudicated youth, their victims, both of their families and their communities; and when properly utilized, can actually help *reduce* the youth's risk of re-offending.
- The focus of SB 367 on *swift, certain and graduated sanctions* for juvenile offenders and *immediate intervention plans* for them has been proven effective in other states that have adopted these evidence-based approaches.
- Case planning for juvenile justice system-involved youth that has the strong foundation of a multi-disciplinary team that involves justice professionals *and* the youth's family is one of the most effective strategies to promote compliance with the youth's intervention/case plan.
- And the attention that SB 367 pays to reentry case planning and the juvenile's successful reintegration back into his/her family and community recognizes the importance of a continuum of support and services.

The VSA Roundtable also addressed the importance of *data collection* to gain a better understanding of the demographics of alleged and adjudicated juvenile offenders and their histories that may involve personal trauma and/or victimization. The emphasis on data collection by SB 367 will provide essential information to guide case management and treatment plans for juvenile offenders that can identify and address their most important challenges and needs, and hopefully prevent further juvenile delinquency through early and effective, evidence-based interventions.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to address the importance of including crime victims and their advocates in a critical leadership role in efforts to reform the juvenile justice system. In my nationwide work on behalf of victims of juvenile offenders, I have *never* before seen the inclusion of a victim advocate on a statewide policy or oversight committee. Kansas and SB 367 have simply awed me by requiring that a "juvenile

crime victim advocate” serve as a member of the proposed Kansas Juvenile Justice Oversight Committee. This is yet another reason that SB 367 is a national model for victim-centric juvenile justice reform that other states should follow.

I encourage the Kansas Legislature to pass SB 367, and Governor Brownback to sign it into law.

Your leadership in doing so will validate the rights and needs of victims of juvenile offenders not only in Kansas, but across our Nation.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.