



Special Committee on Judiciary

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Presented by:

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**Testimony of:**

Kathy Armstrong, Assistant Director for Legal Services  
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Topeka, Kansas

**Testimony on:** Report of Judicial Council Juvenile Offender/ Child in Need of Care  
Advisory Committee

**Chairman King, Chairman Kinzer, Ranking Member Haley and Members of the  
Committee:**

I am Kathy Armstrong, Assistant Director for Legal Services, Prevention and Protection Services, Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF).

The 2014 Substitute for SB 394, as addressed in the Report of Judicial Council Juvenile Offender/Child in Need of Care Advisory Committee on Foster Parents' Rights, provided for establishment of a statutory Foster Care Bill of Rights and related issues. Our agency strives to involve foster care parents as decisions are made about the foster children for whom they are caring. We value and appreciate the role that foster parents play in the lives of children who, for various reasons, have been removed from their home. Our first goal is always to ensure the safety of children in our care. We work to promote permanency, with priority given to returning children to their families. We strive to promote the well-being of children in out-of-home placement. Foster care parents provide a stable and safe environment for children during the time they are in the Secretary's custody.

While we are offering neutral testimony today, we support the concept of a Foster Care Parents' Bill of Rights. DCF did develop and adopt a Foster Parents' Rights document during the summer of 2014. This list of rights is now available on the DCF website. Please find attached a copy of this document. In addition to DCF's adoption of the Foster Parents' Rights, the agency appointed in June 2014 a Foster Parent and Youth Ombudsman. This individual specifically addresses concerns of foster parents and youth. A packet containing a letter from Secretary of DCF, announcement of and contact information for the Ombudsman, and a newsletter that included the Foster Parents' Rights was mailed to every licensed foster home in the State of Kansas.

With respect to issues of concern related to specific suggestions made in the Judicial Council Advisory Committee Report, DCF would like to address the following:

- a. The Report sets forth recommended language at the top of page 10 to address a request from a former foster parent about the well-being of a child after the child has been moved to another placement. If such language was included in a proposed bill, DCF would recommend some revision to this.
- b. On pages 11 through 14 of the Report, section "Establishment of a Grievance Process" provides recommended language regarding an internal review

grievance process. This language is supported, but the specific term used as the named entity responsible to develop and implement such process would need to be reviewed for possible revision.

- c. In the first paragraph at the top of page 16 of the Judicial Council Committee Report, it is suggested certain language be inserted into K.S.A. 38-2255(d)(1) regarding preference for placements in such disposition statute which is duplicative of language in the preceding paragraph of such statutory provision and, therefore, unnecessary. DCF would recommend the suggested language referenced not be inserted into K.S.A. 38-2255(d)(1).

A workgroup made up of many stakeholders/agencies/entities involved in the Kansas child welfare system was initiated in the summer of 2014, and has met regularly to address concerns/issues related to foster parents' rights. When evaluating whether a foster parents' rights should be in policy or statutory form, the group voted by a strong majority, it should be in policy form. This representative group will move forward by utilizing the current DCF Foster Parents' Rights document referred to above to discuss what, if any, proposed revisions the group members will submit in the future to DCF. DCF considers the role of foster parents vital to the child welfare system, and their willingness to assume the responsibilities of care for foster children/youth is highly regarded and appreciated.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Report of Judicial Council JO/CINC Advisory Committee on Foster Parents' Rights.