

DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



3/17/2021

TESTIMONY OF

Laura Howard, Secretary

Kansas Department for Children and Families

TESTIMONY ON

SB 120

Chair

Concannon

Vice Chair

Esau

Ranking Member

Ousley

and

Members of the Committee

SUMMARY OF ISSUE & DCF POSITION

As Secretary for the Department for Children and Families, I have made transparency and collaboration two of my top priorities. It is in this spirit of these priorities that DCF supports Senate Bill 120, which would create a standing, joint committee on child welfare oversight.

CONTEXT & HISTORY

I have always welcomed oversight from the legislature as I believe that it is an important facet of our partnership. Foster care and the child welfare system are bigger than any one entity and it takes all of us working together – across systems and across branches of government to continue to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

This past summer the legislature convened the 2020 Special Committee on Foster Care Oversight. DCF participated in every meeting of the committee, giving presentations and answering questions about the child welfare system. It was a valuable experience for DCF as an agency to receive feedback from the legislature and the diverse array of stakeholders that appeared before the committee. DCF is using the recommendations made by that committee to implement practice improvements.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with the legislature and the joint committee on child welfare oversight to continue to improve supports for Kansas families.

EFFECT OF LEGISLATION

Senate Bill 120 would establish a standing, joint committee on child welfare oversight. This committee would be responsible for reviewing:

- The level of oversight and supervision by DCF over contractors/grantees
- The duties, responsibilities, and contributions of entities that provide child welfare services
- The level of access to child welfare services
- The number of youths in the child welfare system
- Licensing standards in the child welfare system
- Any other topic the committee deems appropriate

FISCAL IMPACT OF LEGISLATION

DCF estimates no fiscal impact from Senate Bill 120. Any DCF staff time required by this committee will be absorbed within current resources.

DCF POSITION

DCF stands in support of Senate Bill 120.

Over the past two years DCF has made significant progress in stabilizing the state's child welfare system and laying a foundation for long term success. And while I am proud of what we have accomplished, there remains work to be done. I am eager to continue this work with the support of the legislature and look forward to continuing our partnership in these efforts by engaging with the joint committee on child welfare oversight.