

DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



3/17/2021

TESTIMONY OF
Laura Howard, Secretary
Kansas Department for Children and Families

TESTIMONY ON
HB 2115

Chair
Hilderbrand

Vice Chair
Gossage

Ranking Member
Petty

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 House Bill 2115, 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

House Bill 2115 would establish a standing, joint committee on child welfare oversight. This committee would be responsible for reviewing:

- Data on child maltreatment and demographic trends impacting child welfare
- The duties, responsibilities, and contributions of DCF, KDADS, KDHE, KDOC, law enforcement, and the judicial branch that impact child welfare
- Programs and services offered to those in the child welfare system including child maltreatment prevention, investigating child maltreatment, in-home family services, and foster care and adoptions services
- Trends in performance outcomes, activities, and improvement plans related to the federal child and family services reviews
- Reports from child welfare stakeholders and other child welfare-related groups
- Implementation of the 2019 child welfare system task force report recommendations
- Reports on concerns received from DCF Office of Customer Service or similar office
- Opportunities for Kansas to strengthen the child welfare system through evidence-based interventions
- Any other topic the committee deems appropriate

FISCAL IMPACT OF LEGISLATION

DCF estimates no fiscal impact from House Bill 2115. Any DCF staff time required by this committee will be absorbed within current resources.

DCF POSITION

DCF stands in support of House Bill 2115.

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.