



House Children and Seniors

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HB 2403

Presented by:

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Secretary

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Testimony of:

Laura Howard, Secretary
Kansas Department for Children and Families

Testimony on:

HB 2403

Chair Concannon and Vice Chair Humphries, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 2403. DCF welcomes this joint committee on child welfare system oversight.

The challenges facing Kansas' child welfare system are complicated and multi-faceted. It will take the efforts of many different stakeholders to overcome these challenges. As such, the department welcomes the oversight and input of the legislature on issues related to the safety and well-being of our state's children.

In 2017 the Child Welfare System Task Force was created. This task force delved into the child welfare system and, using a non-partisan approach informed by evidence, research, and expert opinion, developed a comprehensive report of conclusions and recommendations. The department anticipates that the joint committee that comes out of HB 2403 will take this same approach in reviewing and recommending policies to benefit children in state custody.

Some of the task force's recommendations have been adopted. The department applauds the legislature's decisions to invest in the child welfare workforce and to fund the Family First Initiative. Many more recommendations have been or will be adopted administratively at the agency level.

However, there is still more to be done regarding our state's child welfare system. DCF's ability to provide efficient and effective services to the children of Kansas is still impeded by high caseloads, an antiquated Information technology system that stymies communication, and limited access to appropriate mental health services including psychiatric residential treatment facilities.

We welcome the opportunity to work closely with this oversight committee in crafting solutions that advance the safety and well-being of children and families impacted by the child welfare system. I thank you for the opportunity to testify and am happy to answer any questions.