

# DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



*March 22, 2023*

## **TESTIMONY OF**

Secretary Laura Howard

Kansas Department for Children and Families

## **TESTIMONY ON**

Placement Stability Study Presentation

### **Chairs**

Representative Concannon, Child Welfare and Foster Care

Representative Owens, Corrections and Juvenile Justice

### **Vice Chairs**

Representatives Johnson and Smith

### **Ranking Minority**

Representatives Ousley and Highberger

**and**

**Members of the Committees**

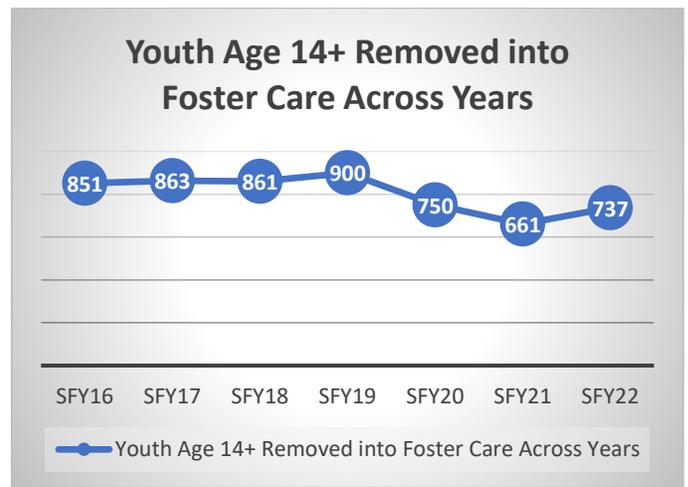
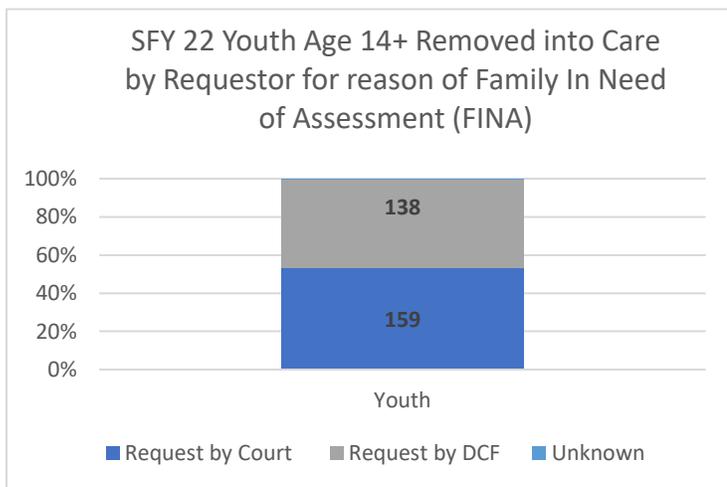
Chairs Concannon and Owens, Vice-Chairs Johnson and Smith, Ranking Members Ousley and Highberger and members of both committees, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to introduce the efforts to support and improve placement stability for children in foster care out of home placement and today’s presentation from Leanne Heaton with the Center for States and the research collaborative at Chapin Hall. As you will hear from Dr. Heaton, the root causes of placement stability go beyond the foster care system and include inadequate community-based prevention services (particularly for older higher-needs youth), a front door to foster care that is too wide, and a lack of placements for older youth with intensive behavior health needs. Much of what you will hear today in the actions we are already taking and in the findings from the Leading for Results effort will reinforce other testimony you have previously heard this session.

## BUILDING PREVENTION CAPACITY

Access to services and supports that are in a youth’s home and community across agencies is key to wellbeing and preventing the need for foster care. DCF efforts preventing the need for foster care for children, especially older youth amplified in 2019 with the launch of Family First Prevention Services Act evidence-based approaches and other key supports. Effective interventions are alongside caregivers increasing the continuum of crisis services and the array of mental health and parental supports.

To gain feedback and shape implementation of performance based contracts across prevention, early intervention and foster care, DCF held a series of stakeholder sessions in August 2022 to prepare the [2023 Performance Based Contracts Report](#) as set forth in HB 2510 of the 2022 legislative session. In these sessions, conversation and momentum surrounded preventing foster care through expanding existing effective interventions and implementing more community and evidenced based opportunities especially with families whose children are older than 12 years in age.

Promising attributes to prevent foster care involve collaborative support across community agencies. To prevent foster care, access to programs across agencies such as law enforcement, mental health, courts, local government, schools and DCF has positive impact. In SFY 22, 737 youth age 14+ were removed into foster care. Of these 737, 298 (40%) were removed for a need for service (FINA), not abuse or neglect. Of the 298, the request for petition or custody for 53% was court, not DCF (n=159/298, 53%.)



In recent years, amplified efforts supported by DCF to create access to meaningful supports include:

- Implementation of pilot [Parent/Youth Facilitation Programs](#) in Saline and Wyandotte Counties made available through federal grant programs at the KU School of Social Welfare. These programs are for

youth age 14+ and their parents or caregivers to help resolve conflict, identify helpful community supports and assure truancy does not result in placement in foster care.

- Expanded statewide Multisystem Treatment (MST), a well-supported mental health evidenced based program to prevent foster care with the latest round of Family First prevention grants, MST will be available statewide beginning July 1, 2023.
- Augmenting service array in future case management agency grants and contracts with opportunities for including Functional Family Therapy (FFT) intervention teams as desired.
- Expanded continuum of crisis care resources:
  - Family Mobile Crisis Helpline through contract with Carelon launched in Oct. 2021. The 24/7 helpline ensures children and young adults between 0-20 have access to a comprehensive crisis system - to prevent the need for emergency department visits, law enforcement contacts, placement in foster care or a disrupted placement while in foster care.
  - 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline launched July 2022 as the three-digit dialing code connecting people for accessible care and support to anyone experiencing a mental health-related crisis.
- Creating Children’s Behavior Interventionist: DCF is working with KDHE and KDADS to create Medicaid funding for Children’s Behavioral Interventionist services for youth aged 3-20. The service goal is for a child/youth to live safely in the home increasing their behavioral function appropriately in daily living activities.
- Facilitating intentional conversations with families and provider collaborators to prevent the need for foster care through Team Decision Making ® and asking four deliberate questions in the process. The Four Questions are used in an Iowa judges’ model.
  1. What can we do to remove the danger instead of the child?
  2. Can someone the child/family knows move into the home to remove the danger?
  3. Can the caregiver and child go live with a relative or fictive kin?
  4. Could child move temporarily to live with relative or fictive kin?

## LEADING FOR RESULTS AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN FOSTER CARE

DCF, case management providers and Child Placing Agencies (CPA) began a Leading for Results: Placement Stability workgroup shortly after a summit convening in the fall of 2019. The Center for States joined the collaboration offering technical expertise on conducting analysis to further describe the scale of Kansas’s challenges with placement instability. The past 3 years, DCF and community partners have implemented approaches to improve placement stability and we know more work is ahead. Approaches include:

- Increase children placed with relatives: established performance goal of 50% placed with relatives and case management agencies implemented staff support for relatives.
- Implemented Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) assessments and court monitoring for the most appropriate and shortest necessary length of stay in residential treatment.
- Emphasized placements in families over facilities to reduce and prevent needs for moves in group care.
- Created a Therapeutic Family Foster Care level of care.
- Added funds for 1 additional staff recruiter in CPA grants to support development of therapeutic homes and additional new family foster homes with capacity to serve youth whose needs are greater.
- Created a network of providers who can opt in to prevent failure to place instances

We are pleased today for the opportunity for your committees to hear from the Center about the efforts to understand the scope of challenges and successes impacting placement stability of children in foster care. While we know that more than 75% of youth in custody experience one or few moves in their prior two months, there are a cohort of youth experiencing more extensive placement instability that you will hear more about today. I am happy to be available for questions as needed after today’s presentation.