

The Testimony of Heidi Beal in favor of HB 2700

Legislators,

My testimony is based on my experience advocating for Kansas families, mine included, who have been destroyed by the foster system.

Last year I reached out to Governor Kelly, DCF Director Laura Howard and every Kansas Legislator on the roster asking for a formal investigation into my family's case. While some of you responded, no one was able to help us because DCF has succeeded in insulating themselves and their contractors from being investigated. In the end, DCF got the outcome they desired and my nephews were given to a foster to adopt.

Likewise, hundreds of children in Kansas have been cut off from their true family by a system that values stranger adoption over family placement. We know that children who are adopted, either at birth or through the foster to adopt network want to know their family and eventually look for them. My family is fortunate that we know who has my nephews. The boys will eventually come back to us but because DCF refused to give them to my husband and I, the boys will never have the opportunity to know their mother. You see, last October she was killed in an automobile accident. The woman who adopted them refused to allow the boys to attend their mother's service. I hope to keep their mother's memory alive through photographs and letters, not knowing if the boys ever receive them. They will likely lose their maternal grandmother before they are old enough to come back to us.

Regarding HB 2700, victims of the child welfare system always welcome policy changes that are designed to protect children. However, without oversight and accountability, this change will bring no improvement whatsoever.

When I spoke to you regarding HB2345, I said that allowing DCF to investigate itself was akin to permitting a defendant in a criminal trial act as his own judge and jury. Laws and policies are worthless if they are not enforced and this change to the statute will be meaningless unless we hold DCF and it's contractors accountable and subject those who violate the law to consequences.

DCF, their contractors and the judicial system is the 'Trifecta' of power that makes up the child welfare system and it is so well insulated from scrutiny that it does as it pleases, legal or not, to achieve the result it wants.

In the case of my nephews, Saint Francis Community Services wanted to give the boys to a foster rather than family so they purged our names from their file, telling the adoption team there were no family members advocating for them. At the same time, the JV court removed a "Request For A Change In Placement" motion filed a few months earlier. These are just two examples of dozens of deceptive maneuvers SFCS and the JV court made in our case to 'seal the deal' with a foster. This is the sort of thing that goes on inside the well protected fortress of the child welfare system.

Defendants in the criminal court system have many protections to insure they receive fair treatment by the court. Family court has no such protections. It is all done in secret and it is impossible to investigate allegations against caseworker fraud or even examine the court proceedings. We must bring these proceedings in to the light of day. Families need a process by which they can defend against false accusations, fraudulent documentation and civil rights violations. Until we do that, the system cannot be reformed and families will continue to suffer at the hands of those employed by it.

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