

TESTIMONY OF MIKE FONKERT
JUST CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR
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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND SENIORS
IN SUPPORT OF HB 2469
MARCH 15, 2022

Members of the House Committee on Children and Seniors:

My name is Mike Fonkert; I am a Campaign Director for Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the belief that Kansans, working together, can build a state full of thriving, inclusive, and just communities.

Kansas Appleseed supports HB 2469. Setting out the specific rights that every foster parent is entitled to will help protect the vital role those foster parents play in the child welfare system in Kansas. This bill of rights will help form the foundation for a better child welfare system.

While there have been some improvements to the foster care system in recent years, it remains a system in crisis that is failing too many of the youth in care. Black children are significantly overrepresented in foster care. Too many Kansas children are staying in foster care for too long and they often experience dangerously high instability in their placements. So far in state fiscal year 2022, black children in Kansas were 2.1 times more likely than white children to be in foster care.¹ The average length of stay in foster care is up over 23 months - the highest it's been since at least 2010.² Kids in foster care are experiencing an average of 6.3 moves for every 1,000 days they are in the system.³ Less than 18% of children attend the same school as they did prior to their entry into the foster care system.⁴ More than 8% of kids leaving the system are re-entering within 12 months.⁵

There is no single solution to address all of these problems, but the solutions must be rooted in a clear statement of rights. When children are removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect, it is vital for them to remain in a family-like setting. Extensive research from the last 20 years reveals that children in family-like foster homes have consistently better experiences and outcomes than children in

¹ Analysis by Kansas Appleseed population estimates from Census Bureau and demographic data from DCF

http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2022DataReports/FCAD_Summary/RacebyCounty_FY22.pdf

² Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Length of Stay and Reason for Ending Out of Home Placement-SFY22."

http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2022DataReports/FCAD_Summary/LengthofstayFY2022.pdf

³ Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Placement Stability: Rate per 1,000 days in Foster Care SFY2022."

http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2022DataReports/FCAD_ContractOutcomes/PlacementStabilityRateFY22.pdf

⁴ Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Attending Same School Success Indicator FY 2022."

http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2022DataReports/FCAD_ContractOutcomes/Same%20School_Success%20Indicator_FY2022.pdf

⁵ Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Re-entry to Foster Care in 12 months FY2022."

http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2021DataReports/FCAD_ContractOutcomes/ReenteredFC_12months_FY2022.pdf

residential or congregate care.⁶ This is only possible if there is an environment with clear and consistent rights for foster parents.

In order to meet the needs of children in care the system stakeholders need to know the basic principles of what every foster parent is entitled to. As of 2019, Foster Parent Bill of Rights have been enacted in 17 states.⁷ DCF in Kansas currently has enumerated these Kansas Foster Parents' Rights in policy,⁸ but enshrining them in law is an important step in making sure these rights are followed and enforced.

If Kansas wants to continue improving conditions for youth in foster care, codifying the rights of foster parents into law is an important step. But more needs to be done to ensure these rights are being enforced and protected. For this reason, Kansas Appleseed supports passage of HB 2468 and looks forward to continued work with stakeholders and legislators to make sure these rights are respected in practice.

⁶ Li, D., Chng, G., and Chu, C. "Comparing Long-Term Placement Outcomes of Residential and Family Foster Care: A Meta-Analysis." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* (2019). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1524838017726427>

⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures. "Foster Care Bill of Rights." 2019. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/foster-care-bill-of-rights.aspx>

⁸ <http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/Foster%20Parents%27%20Rights%20%20DCF-2014.pdf>