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Providing healing and hope  
to children and families.

**Testimony before the Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy  
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**Privatization in Kansas**

Historical Context and Support for Continuing the Public Private Partnership –  
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide some brief comments on the history of privatization and the benefits and challenges these last 20 years have brought to the of child welfare system in Kansas.

As a Senior Advisor to Saint Francis Community Services, I bring twenty-nine and a half years of experience working with children and families and their communities. First as a music therapist in the mental health system, then as a Master Level Social Worker at the community level and finally as an attorney focused on development of policies and laws that positively impact the child welfare system. Over the course of almost 30 years, I have had the opportunity to participate and observe some of the most dramatic changes both positive as well as expected setbacks naturally experienced as a systems grows and matures.

Those years have seen 6 Governor's, 7 Secretaries of SRS and DCF combined and significant swings in the legislature's makeup ten times. During the 20 years of privatization the question has always been "Has privatization worked?" My brief time today will be spent giving you my answer. *But*, the question I will answer actually addresses "What is the best method to ensure we will continually improve and broaden our work together?" The short answer? I saw and experienced the system first-hand in 1996 and I believe we must continue the public/private partnership as the best way to share the collective responsibility... from individuals, families, service providers, the court system, the state and its communities to address the responsibility for children and families. We all have a piece to contribute and we are proud of the work we have done.

**What is important to remember~**

The following highlights create the backdrop for the early foundational days of the public/private partnership. Prior to the public/private partnership:

State of the system prior to privatization

- The child welfare system did not have the resources to adequately fund the needs and address the expectations of the public;
- The ACLU law suit had been filed and the state was attempting to settle the suit;
- SRS provided the foster homes and had to rely on a residentially based system of care as the court removed children.
- Yearly childhood deaths of children in care averaged about 12 per year

- There was no outcome data, no way to confirm where kids were in care on Friday night, and waiting lists for emergency shelters.
- Most children who came into the custody of the state of Kansas were placed in residential care at a rate of almost 90%.
- Adoptions lagged far behind the number this state has seen over the last 15 years
- Available foster homes numbered less than half of homes currently available today
- Because the system was facility based, children had to go to where the facilities were, not to places close to home, in family-like settings, or in their same school.

#### Privatizing child welfare services

- Privatization was seen more and more as a way to bring efficiency to government and was being talked about around the country
- The Kansas Legislature was looking at ways to address what was genuinely perceived as a growing crisis by shifting the responsibility of care to a broader audience
- Although early discussions took place in the legislature, it was the work of the state agency, then SRS, that drove the structural change
- The state made the decision to contract with non-profit service providers that were mission driven and state based – unlike a traditional state private contractor approach which opens itself up to a for profit entity
- Then Secretary Chronister cautioned that privatizing would not save the state money but it would be a process that determined accountability through outcomes and clearer policy expectations for our system of care.

#### The advantages of a public/private partnership

- Fosters a mutual obligation and addresses a public expectation about state responsibility
- More people know about the children in care
- There is comparatively, significant oversight now on how the care is delivered, how children and families are served, and the impact of interventions
- As service providers drive toward outcome goals, they have to become more innovative and open to new ways to reach the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being

#### Where do we go from here?

- Saint Francis Community Services then and now
- We will maintain diligence in keeping children safe, improving well-being and ensuring they have a permanent home
- The work is never “done” and should never be done
- The state has an obligation to ask for accountability from a system where children are placed into their custody
- We must monitor and be creative about how we address our work force needs
- We must take a close look at the strengths of our service network in our communities. As more and more demands are placed on the foster care system we must look to how we can effectively build and support a network of services - collectively, collaboratively and with a common goal in mind - Keeping families together, safe, healthy and strong.