



Children's Alliance of Kansas, Inc.
627 S.W. Topeka Blvd., Topeka, Kansas 66603
www.childally.org (785) 235-5437

Christie Appelhanz, Executive Director

Gordon Docking - KidsTLC, Inc.
President

February 1, 2017

Christie Appelhanz, Executive Director
Children's Alliance of Kansas
Opposition Testimony -- House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee
Hearing on House Bill 2048

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony expressing concerns about House Bill 2048 (Erin's Law). The Children's Alliance is the only association representing private, non-profit, child welfare agencies across the state. We welcome any opportunity to keep the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the forefront of people's thoughts, agendas and policy discussions. As professionals on the front lines, however, we are concerned that attempting to address an issue as complicated as sexual abuse without new resources may produce unintended consequences.

Schools need resources in order to effectively play a role in the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Many Kansas school districts already provide in-service trainings to educators and deliver age-appropriate instruction for students related to child sexual abuse. To expand the number of school districts offering training and curriculum, Kansas must be willing to back up HB 2048 with additional resources to support implementation costs. An unfunded mandate puts children at risk of receiving inadequate information that could do more harm than good.

Something is not always better than nothing when it comes to sexual abuse education.

Instruction related to child sexual abuse has the potential to prompt disclosure by a child. The initial response from an adult has a tremendous impact on a child's recovery and lifelong health outcomes. Not all teachers possess the skills and expertise to lead discussions or provide an appropriate, protective response. It is unfair to expect classroom teachers to provide psychological care when they aren't trained for that responsibility. And it is irresponsible to put children in a situation with the potential to re-traumatize victims.

We can take meaningful action to prevent child sexual abuse.

All children deserve childhoods free from all manner of sexual abuse and exploitation. It is tempting to pass any legislation that appears to address the heinous crime of sexual abuse. Instead of a once-a-year talk in classrooms, we ask the Committee to consider, as many other states have done, creating a task force to study options and provide recommendations on meaningful ways to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation. Experts in the field could create a plan for Kansas with measurable outcomes regarding awareness, identification and response of child sexual abuse.

The 19 member agencies of the Children's Alliance stand ready, willing and able to be part of any solution.