



Kansas Press Association, Inc.

Dedicated to serving and advancing the interests of Kansas newspapers

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March 16, 2017

To: Sen. Rick Wilborn, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and committee members

From: Doug Anstaett, executive director, Kansas Press Association

Re: Testimony in opposition to HB 2128

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I am Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our newspaper association's opposition to language in House Bill 2128.

While the bill only adds 11 words to the Kansas Open Meetings Act, it would seal the lid on public discussions of case reviews, allowing the Governor's Committee on Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board to go behind closed doors to discuss information of high public interest.

Unfortunately, every time we close the curtains on public access to issues of importance, we raise the public's level of distrust that our elected and appointed officials are working in the best interests of all citizens.

Recently, Laura Bauer of the Kansas City Star did an investigative story on how difficult it already is to get information on domestic violence cases in Kansas. Even though the statutes in Kansas are, on their face, much more transparent than those in Missouri, Kansas state officials continue to exploit every excuse possible to deny the public timely and accurate information on those tragic deaths. Bauer says the result is that even with a much stricter law in Missouri, it is still easier to get information there than in Kansas.

Bauer's expose concentrated on the terrible situation surrounding the death in Coffeyville of Brooklyn Coons in 2008. Brooklyn's grandparents have been seeking information from the Kansas Department of Children and Families for almost nine years about why their concerns and warnings were not addressed by the state.

Larry and Mary Crosetto of Coffeyville, according to Bauer's story, see "a child lost in a Kansas child welfare system that is broken and with no accountability."

Even though Larry Crosetto had met with a state social worker about bruises on his granddaughter's body when Brooklyn was not quite 2 years old, and others had reported concerns about marks on her older brother, he was told investigating abuse was the police department's job, not the social worker's.

Little Brooklyn later died when she was beaten and shaken to death by her father's meth-addicted girlfriend.

"Since the toddler's death nine years ago," Bauer wrote, on Jan. 22, "dozens more children have died of abuse and neglect, and others have been seriously injured. Like Brook, many of them were already known to social workers."

The Kansas Press Association is concerned because it appears state officials are more interested in finding cover for themselves than coming to the aid and rescue of abused children and women in Kansas. This preoccupation with secrecy, which the state often points to as necessary for confidentiality reasons, has instead helped perpetuate the very problems these officials are supposed to be helping to prevent.

We realize there are some details that must be kept secret for a variety of reasons. But when we resort to a culture of secrecy, we do not solve problems. It's time for government to stop hiding behind confidentiality and instead start discussing these immense problems in public.

Do not allow the state to add to the secrecy by granting yet another reason for officials to go behind closed doors to discuss issues of public interest.

Thank you.