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Public Written Testimony

Committee on Children and Seniors

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House Bill 2187 Establishing the office of the child advocate for children's protection and services.

I serve on the Citizen Review Board for the 7th Judicial District. In that role, our panel of volunteers make recommendations to the judge on Child in Need of Care cases. As I prepare this testimony on HB 2187, I reflect on case files and interactions with the parties engaged over the past several years. This reflection results in some overall observations that I believe can inform deliberations on this bill:

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. However, in many CINC cases prevention and cure often bleed together on the operating tables of crowded courts. I believe an office of child advocate would help the parties to some of these better understand and accept the available prospects and problems.

Kansas has adopted a partially privatized child welfare system. In doing so we have entangled responsibilities with contracts and economic incentives and disincentives. In my opinion the desire for economic efficiency rather than effectiveness in terms of how we invest in keeping our children safe has provided the impetus for, if not the continuation of, these bifurcated public and private arrangements. The resulting introduction of contractual arrangements into the rightly adversarial court proceedings can compromise the system's capacity to provide the most effective prevention and intervention services for children and families. I believe an office of child advocate would act as a necessary check on this tendency to obscure our larger purposes.