

DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



February 16, 2022

TESTIMONY OF

Deanne Dinkel, Director Safety & Thriving Families and Performance Improvement
Kansas Department for Children and Families

TESTIMONY ON

Proponent Written Only Testimony HB 2632

Chair

Representative Concannon

Vice Chair

Representative Esau

Ranking Minority

Representative Ousley

and

Members of the Committee

SUMMARY OF ISSUE & DCF POSITION

Chairwoman Concannon and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent on HB 2632. House Bill 2632 proposes changes to the Child in Need of Care (CINC) statutes K.S.A. 38-2202 and 2226 to create a program in the department of health and environment to support, train and mentor a statewide network of medical providers to review and provide recommendation to the Secretary for the Department for Children and Families (DCF) on child abuse review evaluation (CARE) referrals. CARE referrals will be submitted to CARE network by DCF upon assignment by the secretary of an investigation of physical abuse, emotional abuse, medical neglect or physical neglect for children five years of age or younger.

CONTEXT & HISTORY

A Safe-Care Kansas pilot program was implemented by DCF in Johnson and Wyandotte counties in October 2021. This pilot program with a budget of \$51,000 is estimated to provide about 500 reviews annually and is federally funded through a Children's Justice Act grant for a term of one year with up to two additional one-year renewals possible. It allows for DCF Child Protection Specialist to submit a medical review referral for a child three years of age or younger who is alleged as a victim of physical abuse or physical neglect. The pilot has provided opportunities to build relationships and engagement with medical professionals to seek medical consult and advice regarding child abuse and neglect concerns.

Statewide during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 21, there were 38,263 reports assigned for response by a child protection specialist, of which over two-thirds (66%) are assigned for investigation of alleged abuse or neglect. Of the reports assigned for investigation for children 18 and younger, 30% are assigned for physical abuse; 24% for emotional abuse; 19% for lack of supervision; 9% physical neglect; and medical neglect is 5%. In SFY21, statewide there were about 5,700 children age three years or younger alleged as a victim of abuse or neglect. In Kansas, about 93% of reports of alleged child abuse or neglect are unsubstantiated. Of the victims substantiated or affirmed for abuse or neglect, 24% are between the ages of 0-3. The pre-verbal or non-verbal developmental stage of children three years of age or younger contributes to greater vulnerabilities. Nationally, almost three-quarters (70.3 percent) of child fatalities in FFY 2019 involved children younger than 3 years (NCANDS data.)

EFFECT OF LEGISLATION & FISCAL IMPACT

This act requires DCF statewide to make a CARE referral for a child five years of age or younger when there is an allegation of physical abuse, emotional abuse, medical neglect or physical neglect and permits a CARE referral for other aged children.

Involvement by a network of experts in child abuse pediatrics results in improved assessments related to alleged child abuse or neglect and positive impact to planning for supports and services for immediate and lasting safety and health for children, their caregivers and families. The review network increases DCF, caregiver and family knowledge of any mechanisms of child abuse injuries, health and safety. The program of CARE providers and its network of medical training support and mentoring across Kansas will have positive impact statewide.

There is no fiscal impact to DCF.

DCF POSITION

DCF is supportive of this legislation with experience in a pilot program for children age three or younger and would ask this committee to pass HB 2632 favorably.