

State of Kansas
House of Representatives

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Gail A. Finney
Representatives, 84th District

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Chairman Rep. Susan Concannon
House Children and Seniors Committee
Attn: Fran.Lusk@House.ks.gov

Re: Proponent Testimony HB 2469 / KS Foster Parent Bill of Rights

Chairman Concannon and Committee Members thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2469, which would formerly establish a Kansas Foster Parents Bill of Rights within our state statutes.

These twenty bills of rights outlined in this bill are practical, and they are identical to the Kansas Department of Children and Families' (DCF) current policy. However, they are unknown to most foster parents. As a veteran foster parent in Kansas, I was surprised to learn just last fall that DCF had a Foster Parents Bill of Rights policy. I had never heard of, seen, or read any foster bill of rights policies. Nor had anyone ever mentioned it to me. It's possible, however, that it may have been mentioned in my initial foster care training class eight years ago. But since that time and three foster agencies later, I was not aware of these rights. It wasn't until a foster youth that wanted to have their voice heard in a court hearing about their future placement reached out to me for help, that I learned about these policies by searching Google.

Prior to this bill there have been several other legislative attempts by different legislators over the years to establish a foster parents bill of rights within Kansas statutes to give foster parents more of a voice, including current Rep. Brenda Landwehr's bill in 2002 (HB 2908). Since then, there are now nearly 7,000 foster youth in Kansas under the care of hundreds of foster parents who are an integral, indispensable, and vital to our foster children's care, development, stability, and safety. Foster parents today are still expressing their desire to be heard when it comes to making decisions concerning their foster children and wish there was more support for foster families to ensure that the children are less likely to "disrupt," or leave a foster home.

Our foster parents deserve to know, understand, and have their rights readily accessible and enforceable by law in the Kansas foster care system. What good are these rights if no one knows about them and they are unenforceable by law? The bills of rights need to be in statute and broadly accessible and recognizable, so that everyone involved will be on the same page. Sometime important policies can and do change with different administrations and just because it's written down in a policy manual doesn't mean it's always followed. We shouldn't have this bill but if these policies aren't being afforded, respected, or changed from administration to administration, then maybe this bill will be that added layer of protection.

I strongly support implementing the foster parents bill of rights into state law because it is a win-win for our foster parents, foster youth, DCF and the state. There will be no fiscal effect to DCF, according to the budget director, and DCF already has these foster parents bill of rights in their policies, rules, and regulations. Please support HB 2469.