

SENATE FEDERAL & STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 262

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee. I am Jim Snyder, Speaker Pro Tem for the Kansas Silver Haired Legislature. We favor passage of this bill.

Our main purpose is twofold. 1. To keep families together and 2. To provide a method by which the number of children in Kansas Foster Care is reduced for the benefit of both the child and the Kansas taxpayer.

Presently, as in the attached article from the Topeka Capital Journal, there are approximately 5200 Kansas children in foster care. Nobody can even guess how many are happy and content with their lot, but I would imagine it falls far below 50%. And, when you consider that it costs the State coffers more than \$20,000 per child per annum, it makes it even more imperative to ease the path of grandparents who pass the criteria and have the desire to bring their grandchildren into their homes on a permanent basis.

The Kansas Silverhaired legislature requests your favorable action on SB 262.

Thank you.

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SRS offers \$300,000 to spur adoption

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By Tim Carpenter

THE CAPITAL-JOURNAL

Jonathan and Allison Schumm's family is big enough to conduct a regulation basketball game. That wouldn't be possible without five siblings adopted by the Topeka couple to complement their three biological children.

The team was present at the Kansas Children's Discovery Center for the announcement Monday of the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services' offer of \$300,000 from a federal grant to the company proposing the most imaginative one-year marketing campaign to recruit adoptive families.

"This is a heartfelt cause," said SRS Secretary Robert Siedlecki. "This campaign is directed towards our children who are typically hardest to place in adoptive families — the kids of sibling groups, with mental or physical disabilities or teenagers."

He said the state had 5,200 children in foster care. Five hundred of 900 in the adoption queue are awaiting completion of the adoption process, but 420 haven't yet been linked with a prospective adoptive family.

"Those 400 children really are alone," Siedlecki said.

Jonathan Schumm said he could attest to the compelling force for good generated by adoption of children. His roster: Nicole, 16, Alisa, 13, Emmanuel, 11, Jaquale, 6, Angel, 5, Mercy, 5, Isaiah, 3, and Kyrsten, 1.

"I'm not here to tell you foster care and adoption are easy," he said while the children played in the center's kid-friendly facility. "It's been worth every smile and every tear."

He said information on children available for adoption in Kansas could be found at www.adoptkskids.org. Some children still on the list were there six years ago when Schumm and his wife initially became involved in foster care and adoption.

"So many kids are still waiting," he said.

Gov. Sam Brownback decreed November as Kansas Adoption Month. On Nov. 19, several court jurisdictions in Kansas will finalize at least 100 adoptions to mark the declaration.

Brownback and his wife, Mary, adopted two children from overseas. A son, Mark, celebrated his 14th birthday Monday.

"Adoption is fabulous," the governor said at the Statehouse. "It just brings a smile to my face every time I think about it. My hope is more families will step up."

He said his family's decision to not adopt in Kansas reflected his trips while in Congress to orphanages in other countries, many of which didn't have a strong cultural tradition of adoption.

In addition, the governor said he was aware of a U.S. family that struggled for six years to complete an adoption.

Siedlecki, the top administrator at SRS, said adoptions through the state of Kansas were completed at little or no cost and were legally secure because parental rights had been severed.

Kansas families who adopt children may be eligible for state or federal financial subsidies, he said. Funding is available for health care of adopted children through Medicaid and for college tuition for children adopted from state care after age 16.

Siedlecki said the goal of SRS was to complete more than 800 adoptions in the current fiscal year ending in July. In the last fiscal year, the state finalized 761 adoptions. In the first three months of the year, 178 children have been adopted from state care in Kansas.

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