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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy

Good morning. My name is Lindsey Stephenson. I am a clinically licensed social worker and am the Vice-President of Operations for KVC Behavioral HealthCare, Inc. (KVC Kansas). KVC is a private non-profit organization and is a licensed Child Placing Agency fulfilling the requirements and standards for the State of Kansas. As such, KVC provides foster care services for children and youth that have been removed from the home due to abuse or neglect. Foster families provide 24-hour substitute care for children and support for their parents while children are removed from their birth family due to physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect or other circumstances requiring out-of-home care. KVC foster families provide supervision, protection, and care in accordance with the identified need(s) of the children and youth placed in the home.

KVC's Child Placing Department provides safe, supportive family settings in which children and youth can be supervised and cared for as their permanency goals are addressed utilizing a family centered practice approach. Children and youth in KVC's foster family program are exposed to values, training, attitudes and skills to enable them to function successfully in the mainstream of society. The program adheres to the principles of least restrictive environment and experiential learning. Another goal of this intervention is to help children and youth learn new behaviors and ways of viewing their world, increasing the potential for breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect.

**Foster Parent Duties:** It is the role of foster parents to provide a safe, healthy (both physical and emotional) setting that supports children and youth and their families in moving towards permanency. Individual daily needs and structure should be provided so that children and youth progress in their identified daily programs and receive necessary medical and dental prevention or treatment and continue with as little additional disruption to their lives as is possible during this extraordinarily difficult time. Clear expectations and consistency are of utmost importance in making a child or youth feel safe. KVC foster parents are highly trained volunteers who assume the responsibility and high expectations related to caring for children and youth requiring special support. Each prospective foster parent is assessed based upon their ability to meet the needs of children served by KVC.



**Qualifications:** A KVC foster parent must:

- be at least 21 years of age
- have sufficient income or resources to provide for the basic needs of the foster family and foster child or youth
- complete the 30-hour Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence (PS-MAPP) or individualized Deciding Together (DT) training. These include home consults which everyone in the family is required to attend and conclude with a Family Based Assessment summary, including recommendations to the licensing agency
- successfully complete KBI, CANIS and fingerprint-based background checks as required
- complete health assessments
- be licensed by the Department for Children and Families' licensing division and have knowledge of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and codes pertaining to licensing and providing foster care.
- complete First Aid, Universal Precautions, and Medication Management before a full license may be issued
- participate in an initial family assessment and an updated family assessment at each renewal
- complete at least the identified hours of training required annually (16 – 24) that corresponds to the type of care provided (Family, Intermediate, Transition, Intensive or Supportive Family Living foster care.) The training must be of a related topic to the children or youth services
- have knowledge of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and codes pertaining to licensing and providing foster care
- have knowledge of positive parenting and child development
- provide crisis intervention and support as needed.
- agree to follow the Foster Family Provider Requirements as written and adhere to the Placement Agreement Requirements as written
- have the ability to establish and maintain a working relationship with KVC, the children or youth in care, and birth parents of the children or youth in care, schools, community, courts, and DCF
- have the ability to communicate effectively.
- notify identified KVC staff, call the emergency on-call number, within one (1) hour of any critical incident or potential critical incident (e.g. injury, running away or informs them of intention to run away, family conflict, etc.)
- participate in the development of the child's case plan and provide feedback to the team on progress
- respect the right of confidentiality relating to information regarding the foster child or his/her family. The right of confidentiality includes refraining from identifying a foster child as such in any internet communications with others, including social networking sites.
- strive to maintain an objective, positive attitude and understanding toward the birth parents and other family members of the child in care
- will accept and encourage contacts between the child and his/her parent family by:

- supporting the child's contact with his/her parents and siblings
- having the child ready for each contact
- having clothing packed for overnight visits
- providing transportation or a place to visit when agreed to in the visitation plan
- helping the child accept each transition from his/her parent following a visit or contact
- reporting the child's reactions after contacts with his/her family to the KVC CPA worker
- notify KVC of any unplanned contacts between the child and the parent, or between the foster parent and parent
- agree to incorporate the child into the family affording him/her the same privileges and responsibilities as other family members, appropriate to his/her age and abilities
- agree to preserve and maintain all personal possessions and documented records of the child and relinquish said belongings, including those acquired while in their care
- notify KVC of any changes or impending changes in family/household composition including, but not limited to moving, new persons living in the home, marriage, death, divorce, adoption, or serious illness
- agree to utilize foster care payments to meet the needs and expenses of the individual child. Expenses may include but are not limited to increase in utility bills due to placement, food, clothing, hygiene needs, school expenses, etc.
- agree that in case of medical emergencies, they shall transport the child to the nearest hospital

Foster parents are, by law, mandated reporters and must call the Kansas Protection Report Center (1-800-922-5330) to report suspected child abuse or neglect for any child or youth, whether or not the child or youth is in care (1.800.922.5330). Foster parents understand that any allegation made against them of abuse or neglect may result in immediate removal of foster children from the home until the investigation is complete.

Each foster family is required to provide a minimum of three individuals who will be contacted as references for the family. One may be from a family member and two shall be from non-family members. Each of the three individuals will be sent the confidential KVC Foster Family Reference Questionnaire. They will be asked to complete the entire questionnaire to the best of their knowledge. Information gathered will be used by KVC in determining sponsorship of the prospective foster family. Each KVC foster family must have at least three positive references on file and complete all licensing requirements prior to taking a placement of a child.

As you can see, KVC asks a great deal of its foster parents and, in turn, works diligently to provide significant supports to assist them in their important role. Just some of these supports include:

- 24/7/365 crisis support
- Clothing allowances
- Child care and mileage support as per identified criteria
- Payment of a daily rate in accordance with the level of foster care required to meet the child's individual needs

- Foster Parent Advisory boards, giving foster family representatives opportunities to provide direct input and feedback into programming
- iPads to enhance communication and training
- Back to School supplies, birthday gifts and Christmas gifts
- A foster family newsletter published monthly and available on the KVC website ( a tool for sharing good news, educational information about licensing regulations, training and parenting tips.)
- Family Support Groups, hosted routinely across the state, to help families share and learn new skills to better meet the needs of children in their care. Topics range from discipline to building self-esteem; families are encouraged to suggest helpful topics
- Foster Parent Training Opportunities: KVC offers opportunities for foster families to receive or exceed the required annual 16 or 24 hours of continuing education that includes topics required by DCF Licensing and the DCF contract
- the KVC Foster Family Conference. This weekend getaway provides opportunities for education, child/youth excursions, family networking and family fun. This is completely underwritten for families and supported by numerous KVC fundraising events
- annual family appreciation events
- specialized, research supported training in Trauma Systems Therapy for Foster Parents (TST-FP), a skill-building, trauma-focused curriculum for foster parents and other caregivers, written and adapted by KVC

When KVC receives a referral from DCF, it has 4 hours in which to take physical custody. KVC's Admissions Department operates 24/7/365. If immediate placement with an approved relative or kin cannot be made, the Admissions Department endeavors to make the best possible match for a child with the family best able to meet their needs. Guided by the philosophy of "First Placement/Last Placement" they strive for children to experience minimal further trauma of moves, before achieving permanency. Priority goals include; placement nearest home and keeping sibling groups together, in order to minimize the impact of trauma that comes with additional moves.

In efforts to achieve these goals, KVC gathers as much detailed child information available at referral and sends referrals to all Child Placing Agencies within its network, asking for help locating the most optimal placement. Those agencies call or email if they have placement options they believe to be a good match.

KVC also begins searching its internal Matching Families Database for the best match within KVC sponsored foster families. KVC maintains a comprehensive database of information on all KVC sponsored foster families. This allows for a timely, electronic query, matching individual child variables such as; skills and willingness to meet the individual needs of the child, information pertaining to other children currently in the home, space for siblings, language, pets (allergies), and proximity to the child's family/home school.

In addition, the evidence based Structured Decision Making System (SDM) for Placement Support tools from The Children's Research Center, are also utilized to support the matching process. SDM tools include: Provision of Care Assessments, Placement Assessments, Support Assessment sand Placement Safety Assessments. The SDM Support Assessment tools help

determine the level of support a family may need when a youth is placed in their home as well as help identify potential mismatches between caregiver skills and a child's needs.

All the while working under the 4 hour requirement, all potential options discovered through subcontractor responses and KVC's matching database are reviewed for the best placement option to meet the child's individual needs. To ensure an appropriate match, Admissions compares the each child's level of needs to the level of needs the home agrees to and is trained to support. The level of needs the home is able to accept is ultimately determined by subcontracting agency or KVC's CPA worker for that home.

Once the family confirms agreement to accept the child, the case manager, their supervisor, and their director are notified, allowing for additional oversight and placement input if necessary. In certain situations, exceptions are requested in order to allow a foster home to exceed the number for which they are licensed. This is utilized only in special circumstances, such as to keep sibling groups together.

KVC's family recruitment and retention strategies have resulted in a continual increase in the number of KVC sponsored foster families; 503, 571 and 616 represent the number of sponsored homes for October of 2014, 2015 and 2016, respectively. With most families licensed for more than one child this represents a much higher licensed bed capacity. But with the goal of "First Placement/Last Placement" (prior to permanency), many, more strong foster families are needed. When you factor in the goals of matching for proximity to family, desired age groups, individualized special needs and the ability to accommodate sibling groups, many additional placement resources are needed and so KVC continues to increase efforts in family recruitment. The Safety While in Foster Care standard has remained one of the strongest in the nation, above 99% since at least 2000. KVC is committed to working closely with DCF to continually identify strategies to assure that appropriate licensing and monitoring are in place to assure continued high safety standards without creating unintended barriers to timely licensure to ensure adequate placement resources for the children and youth who need them.