



Children's Alliance of Kansas, Inc.

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**Christie Appelhanz, Executive Director, Children's Alliance of Kansas
Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy
Testimony on Duties, Qualifications and Selection of Foster Families**

Thank you, Chairman Knox, and members of the Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy for the opportunity to provide testimony on the duties, qualifications and selection of foster families. Children's Alliance of Kansas is the only association in the state representing private, non-profit, child welfare agencies. Along with our membership, we are dedicated to preserving and strengthening Kansas children and families. Children's Alliance owns the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP), a series of training programs for prospective foster and adoptive families utilized across the country. The Kansas Department for Children and Families contracts with Children's Alliance to train MAPP leaders, provide the pre-service training program and maintain an ongoing training network for foster and adoptive parents and professional child welfare staff.

The process to become a foster parent in Kansas takes time and dedication.

The process to become a foster parent can take up to six months. Kansans interested in fostering or adopting begin by completing a 30-hour, 10-week program called Trauma-Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanency – Model Approach for Partnerships in Parenting (TIPS-MAPP). The program is a mutual selection process. Prospective families determine if fostering is right for them now. Leaders to get to know families to complete an assessment regarding if they possess the competencies necessary to be successful. In addition, families are required to complete First Aid and CPR, Medication Administration, and Universal Precautions trainings.

Families must pass a child abuse check and fingerprint criminal background check through the Kansas Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Any convictions listed on the Declaration of No Prohibitive Offenses for Licensure prohibit someone from becoming a foster or adoptive parent. In some cases, even a diversion for the listed offenses prohibits someone from becoming a foster or adoptive parent. Homes must be able to meet licensing guidelines and families must demonstrate they have sufficient income to care for a child. Licensure of homes is at the discretion of sponsoring agencies and state licensing.

Once becoming licensed, families continue building strengths by completing required continuing education hours based on the level of care provided. These hours are to be completed prior to renewing a foster care license each year.

Kansas has a premier foster and adoptive parent training program.

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families conducts extensive Child & Family Service Reviews (CFSR) in every state. An overall rating of Strength or Area

Needing Improvement is assigned to each indicators reviewed. States utilizing the MAPP Program as it was intended – including Kansas -- received the highest rating of "Strength" in their foster and adoptive parent training section. The CFSR has documented the effectiveness of the MAPP program in the following areas:

- Reduced incidence of child abuse/neglect in foster care
- Reduced recurrence of maltreatment
- Reduced foster care reentries
- Reduced length of time to achieve reunification
- Reduced length of time to achieve adoption
- Increased stability of foster care placement

Kansas enjoys an advantage because the national MAPP program is based in our state. In addition to allowing Kansas to utilize the program at a fraction of what other states pay, the national MAPP experts regularly provide on-the-ground consulting to Kansas MAPP leaders. For example, on November 15th, 2016, more than 70 MAPP leaders will meet in Olathe for training on the latest research, maintaining fidelity and implementing new regulations, an event facilitated by the National Experts in MAPP.

Ensuring communities have the capacity to keep kids safe.

If the training and selection of foster families is one of the best in the country, what is happening in Kansas child welfare? Quite simply, we are asking foster parents to take additional and more challenging kids while they receive fewer public and private supports needed to be successful. The environment for children and families has changed and the gaps for what's needed today are beginning to show. The private, non-profit, child welfare agencies across the state are working to fill the gaps, and yet the current system is unsustainable.

Kansas is one of 33 states experiencing an increase in the number of children in foster care. As the state works to decrease incarceration of low-risk juveniles after overhauling its juvenile justice system in the 2016 session, the child welfare system is preparing for an additional influx of youth. Kansas health care providers have experienced 4 percent cut in Medicaid reimbursement rates, which affects providers' ability to offer complete services at Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) for children in the system. Rates to child placing agencies to support foster parents have not been increased since 2007 in Kansas. This comes at a time when prevention and early intervention services for mental health, addiction and financial security have been scaled back. Compounding the challenges, providers are faced with new unfunded federal mandates, including overtime rules that divert resources away from serving foster families.

More regulations and paperwork won't make children safer in Kansas. Stepping away from the system of privatization that provides checks and balances as well as encourages innovation and collaboration won't either. If we're serious about improving the foster care system, we need to build and adequately resource the capacity in communities to meet the needs of children and families. **This means an integrated, comprehensive, flexible system of support including appropriate services for prevention, stabilization, intervention and treatment. The right services for children and families at the right time for the right length of time.** Then, and only then, can we build a world where every single Kansas child has a good shot at a successful, productive future.