March 15, 2019

Christie Appelhanz, Executive Director
Before the Children and Seniors Committee
Opposition testimony to SB 162 Requiring notification to the governor and legislature of missing foster care youth

Chairwoman Concannon and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christie Appelhanz, and I am the executive director of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is the association for 17 private, non-profit child welfare agencies serving families across the state. As we oppose SB 162 today, it is important to note the Children's Alliance is in no way opposed to transparency or accountability – in fact, child welfare contractors already provide notification to the Kansas Department for Children and Families as called for in the bill. I cannot, however, stand before you as a child advocate and pretend this bill will do anything to address the issue of children who run from their placements or any other challenge facing the Kansas child welfare system.

Running away is a serious problem behavior that occurs frequently among youth in the foster care system. We owe it to our kids to not just find them, but to address the things they are running from and to. Youth tell us they want more opportunities to see their families and stay connected to their neighborhoods and friends. Research tells us that investing in stable placements, mental health services and substance use treatment will help reduce the magnitude of the problem.

It is difficult for me to comprehend why we need more information when we already have a road map. The Child Welfare System Task Force met over the course of 18 months and adopted the following five recommendations as its highest priority recommendations:

1. **Workforce.** The State of Kansas should invest in the child welfare system workforce by increasing funding for recruitment, retention, and support to effectively attract and retain high-quality staff;

2. **Data Infrastructure.** The State of Kansas should create a single, cross-system, web-based, integrated case management and data reporting system that can be used by the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) and all relevant agencies and stakeholders to efficiently and effectively share information (e.g., education, dental, medical, behavioral);

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3. **Families First Act.** The State of Kansas should fund and institute the federal Families First Prevention Services Act in Kansas and follow the federal guidelines;

4. **Access to Care.** The State of Kansas should require access to high-quality and consistent medical and behavioral health care for Medicaid-eligible high-risk youth through the Medicaid state plan or other appropriate sources of funding; and

5. **Code for Care of Children.** The Judicial Council should review the Code for Care of Children (CINC Code), especially with regard to: a) the way DCF's definition of "non abuse neglect" relates to cases under the CINC Code, and b) modifications to meet the child's ongoing best interests for permanency.

If the Kansas Legislature is serious about a commitment to children and families in the child welfare system, please consider requiring notification of these items related to task force recommendations:

- Implementation status of Child Welfare Task Force recommendations, and funding appropriated for implementation
- Funding appropriated for Family First implementation, and implementation status
- Number of uninsured Kansans, and the number who would be uninsured if Kansas were to expand Medicaid
- Number of removals, and the share of removals for neglect
- Number of Kansas children on Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility waiting lists
- Number of Kansas children living in poverty
- Number of Kansans affected by implementation of the Hope Act
- Number of Kansans with a diagnosed substance addiction
- Number of Kansans with a diagnosed mental health condition

Meaningful progress is possible. We have an excellent task force report to guide us all in making that a reality. Kansas children are counting on you.