



**Proponent Testimony on HB2149
House Children and Seniors
February 2, 2021**

Chair Concannon and Members of the Committee, my name is Rachel Marsh, CEO of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is an association of 18 private, non-profit child welfare agencies that collectively provide a full array of services for children and families in child abuse and neglect prevention, family preservation, foster care, adoption, independent living, and parent, youth, and child skill-building, mental health, and substance use treatment. One of the purposes of the Alliance is to advocate for public policy that strengthens child and family well-being in Kansas. The Children's Alliance supports HB2149 as perhaps the most critical bill the Kansas legislature can pass this year to help children in foster care in a tangible, immediate way. We thank this Committee for your consideration of this bill and for the opportunity to explain our support.

HB2149 is needed to improve outcomes for children in foster care. One of the priority issues for the Children's Alliance this year – and for the child welfare and family wellbeing system across the country in recent years – is adequate recognition of the importance of kinship care for children in foster care. Kinship care is foster care, provided by extended family members that children already know and love. Kinship placements reduce the traumatic impact of being placed in foster care. Kinship placements are associated with faster times to permanency, increased placement stability, and improved wellbeing for children in care. Kinship placements need the opportunity to be fully licensed and receive the full array of support available to other foster homes, but currently, some kinship families in Kansas are barred from licensure under KSA 65-516. KSA 65-516 prohibits individuals with certain, far-distant prohibited offenses – even from youth – for being licensed to care for foster children. KSA 65-516 offers no statute of limitations for offenses, no appeal or exception process, and no common-sense discretion in favor of the best interests of the child. This means that kinship families may not receive the same financial support, child placing agency support, or other benefits that are needed to ensure placement stability and child wellbeing.

HB2149 is needed to support youth with complex needs and families that love them. Another priority issue for the Children's Alliance is improving our state's response to youth with complex needs, which includes youth that struggle with acting out behaviors that can lead to juvenile justice charges. Research shows that most youth with these behaviors have a family trauma history – just like most other children in foster care. When our efforts are successful, we can locate permanent, adoptive homes for children with juvenile justice history. However, the statute (KSA 65-516) needing updated by HB2149 also bars families who provide care for youth with juvenile justice backgrounds from providing care for other youth in need. This bar means adoptive parents and custodians must

make heart-breaking and needless choices between foster children and former foster children, now part of the family.

DCF, Children's Alliance members, and foster and adoptive parents, are presenting testimony today outlining strong support for HB2149 – a bill that simply creates a “common sense” valve applied to the statute prohibiting certain offenses. Their stories represent hundreds of other stories that have occurred in our state that have negatively impacted children in foster care. The Kansas legislature has the opportunity to take a meaningful, necessary, and compassionate step toward supporting foster youth in Kansas today by passing HB2149. We request the support of this Committee to help make this happen.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of HB2149. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Members of the Children's Alliance of Kansas:

CALM, Emporia
Cornerstones of Care, Overland Park
DCCCA, Lawrence
Eckerd, Wichita
EmberHope, Wichita
Florence Crittenton, Topeka
FosterAdopt Connect, Olathe
Great Circle, Lawrence
Kansas Children's Service League, Topeka
KVC Kansas, Olathe
KidsTLC, Olathe
Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Mayetta
Restoration Family Services, Wichita
Saint Francis Ministries, Salina
TFI Family Services, Topeka
The Children's Shelter, Lawrence
The Villages, Topeka
Wichita Children's Home, Wichita