

Megan Monsour

Direct: (316) 631-3123

Direct Fax: (316) 631-1723

Email: mmonsour@hinklaw.com

Please Respond to the Wichita Office

February 15, 2022

Senate and House Committees on Children and Seniors
Statement in Support of HB 2700

Proponent Written Only Testimony

Re: In Support of HB 2700

Dear Chairwoman Concannon and Children and Seniors Committee Members:

My name is Megan Monsour. I am an adoption attorney in Wichita, KS. I would like to voice my support of HB 2700.

My practice focuses solely on adoption and family building. I have had the privilege of finalizing hundreds of adoptions over the past 14 years. I represent both foster families and kinship families seeking to protect and ensure the best interests of the children of Kansas. I have seen our foster care system work beautifully and I have also seen our system fail our most vulnerable children. There is work to be done. This legislation is a good start. I believe HB 2700 will create a necessary pause to review whether or not a selected adoptive home is truly in a child's best interest.

Our current child welfare system rightfully prioritizes placing children with their biological family. While we can agree with this goal, the reality is much more nuanced. The goal of placing children with relatives simply does not serve the best interest of children in all circumstances.

The well-intentioned priority of keeping a child with their relatives cannot be enforced at the cost of all other factors. Our Courts have agreed with that premise, specifically in *In re G.M.A.*, 30 Kan. App. 2d 587, 588-93, 43 P.3d 881 (2002), however the reality of placements does not live up to this standard in my experience.

I have represented foster family after foster family who have cared for a child for years, in some cases the majority of a child's life, who are not chosen to be the child's adoptive home. In practice, the biological connection many times outweighs the attachment the child has with their current caregivers. That is simply not what science shows us is what is in a child's best interest. I implore you to research and hear from qualified therapists and experts on attachment theory and what a disruption from a primary care giver does to a child.

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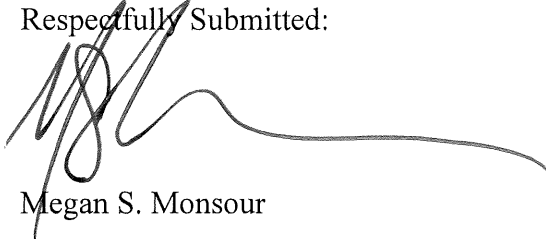
I have heard many times over the years that the Department of Children and Families believes that children, even being removed from long-term foster homes, do better with family members because of their shared history. I have never seen research to show long-term outcomes of children placed with biological family members. If this is the information that our child welfare system is relying upon, they should have the data to back that up and I urge you to ask for such a study for our Kansas children.

The myopic view of the priority of 'blood' placements is hurting our Kansas children. HB 2700 is a good start to opening the lens of our system to ensure children have the best home and future we can give them.

Please join me in my support of HB 2700.

I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Megan S. Monsour