

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF MARY MOFFATT, M.D.  
EMERGENCY MEDICINE PEDIATRICIAN AND CHILD ABUSE PEDIATRICIAN  
HOUSE CHILDREN AND SENIORS COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF HB 2187

FEBRUARY 20, 2020

Members of the House Children and Seniors Committee,

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my support for HB 2187 and the establishment of an Office for the Child Advocate (OCA) for the state of Kansas. My name is Mary Moffatt. I reside in Johnson County, Kansas. I am an Emergency Medicine Pediatrician and a Child Abuse Pediatrician working at a large children's hospital in the Kansas City area. Currently, I hold three certifications from the American Board of Pediatrics: Child Abuse Pediatrics, Pediatric Emergency Medicine and General Pediatrics. My combined roles in Pediatric Emergency Medicine and Child Abuse Pediatrics afford me the privilege of evaluating and managing children who are acutely ill or injured, of which for some there are concerns of child abuse and neglect. Professionally, my work involves frequent and ongoing collaboration with the child welfare systems in both Kansas and Missouri. I believe that every child deserves a safe, stable, nurturing and healthy childhood as a foundation to optimal well-being throughout life; I am passionate about advocating to help achieve this for every child.

Much of my work is done in teams, both within the healthcare system and external to it in the communities, regions and states where children live and are supposed to thrive. Team based function is a crucial element to achieving success. Unfortunately, despite the best of intentions, outcomes resultant from team-based effort are sometimes not as good or strong as they could be. Resources may be lacking, team members may be overwhelmed with their tasks and responsibilities, effective collaboration among team members may be challenged. The need for transparent, critical analysis focused on both the strengths and weaknesses of the team by a neutral party with the lens to identify areas for sustained improvement is apparent. An Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) for the state of Kansas could be instrumental in helping the teams charged with keeping Kansas children safe achieve better outcomes.

An OCA would provide an opportunity for citizens and professionals in the state of Kansas to share concerns about the child welfare system and request an independent and unbiased review of cases reported to the Department of Children and Families and involved contract agencies. In addition to individual case reviews, the OCA investigation process could help to identify system based challenges and barriers within the child welfare system directly affecting vulnerable children, lead to increased transparency of processes and errors, build trust in the Department of Children and Families, and provide specific recommendations for system based improvements.

Through my work in Missouri, I have seen firsthand how the OCA has helped to identify inconsistent adherence to policies and procedures that lead to a child being left in an unsafe caregiving environment without addressing the features of the environment and resulting in ongoing injury and harm to the child. Unfortunately, this child was not a lone example of faulty decision making and process execution.

As a result of the work of the Missouri OCA, individual and system-based errors were identified, and changes implemented to improve outcomes for children. For example, now when a child under 4 years of age is reported to child protective services for concern of child abuse or neglect, Child Abuse Pediatricians have a role in the statewide review system to aid in identification of which children require a medical evaluation of the reported concerns. When a medical provider makes a diagnosis of child physical abuse now, the case must now be referred by child protective services to the jurisdiction's family court for review. There has been increased collaboration among the professionals comprising the multidisciplinary team responsible for the societal response for child maltreatment, which in turn should result in improved outcomes for vulnerable children. Team-based function has been improved and children in Missouri are safer than prior to implementation of these changes.

The establishment of an OCA in Kansas would provide support and facilitate change that is vitally needed within the child welfare system. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of HB 2187.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary E. Moffatt", written in a cursive style.

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