

To: Representative Holscher  
From: Sarah Manriquez, LSCSW, LCSW

Re: HOUSE BILL No. 2299

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the proposed changes to K.S.A.2018 Supp. 21-6815.

My name is Sarah Manriquez and I live in Kansas City, MO. I am a practicing social worker in the state of Kansas with a clinical license in both Kansas and Missouri. My specialty lies in providing therapy services to trauma survivors, specifically victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

I recently read an article in the Kansas City Star about a case in Leavenworth KS in which the judge identified the 13 and 14 year old children as aggressors of sexual violence against a 67 year old man who had solicited nude pictures of these under age girls.

I am writing today to share my support for proposed changes outlined in HB 2299, specifically Section 1(A) proposing to address the specific treatment of minors and sexual assault victims who are facing criminal charges as "aggressors" of sexual crimes. The specific language highlighting that victims of human trafficking, incest or those individuals under the age of 16 should not be considered aggressors is important to consider when determining criminal conviction and sentencing.

In my 15+ years in the field of social work practice I have witnessed the impact that trauma plays on the behaviors and development of children's behaviors. Child victims of abuse and trauma are particularly susceptible to skewed perceptions of how positive and healthy relationships are created and sustained. Neuroscience teaches us that the brain is not yet developed with a fully functioning prefrontal cortex (essential for problem solving, rational thinking and critical forethought) until the age of 26 in a healthy developing child. Children who have experienced trauma and abuse can develop unhealthy attachments and problematic beliefs that the world is a scary place. These children often live in a constant state of hyperarousal in which they perceive all persons as dangerous. Without adequate mental health treatment and safety interventions, they struggle to mitigate relationships and set healthy boundaries for themselves. If these victims are unsupported by healthy adult figures they are more likely to be manipulated by unhealthy adults with whom their crosses pass.

In conclusion, I am advocating for changes that will secure more appropriate treatment and intervention for victims of abuse and sexual trauma than incarceration.

Respectfully,  
Sarah Manriquez, LSCSW, LCSW