

TESTIMONY OF MIKE FONKERT
JUST CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR
KANSAS APPLESEED CENTER FOR LAW AND JUSTICE

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
IN SUPPORT OF SB 51
MARCH 23, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Education:

My name is Mike Fonkert; I am a Campaign Director for Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the belief that Kansans, working together, can build a state full of thriving, inclusive, and just communities.

Kansas Appleseed supports SB 51. By requiring an annual report on important educational information concerning students in foster care, SB 51 will help shine a light on the best path forward for foster care reform, particularly when it comes to education performance.

The foster care system in Kansas is in crisis.¹ Too many Kansas children are in the foster care system and they are entering at racially disproportionate rates. Kansas children are staying in foster care for too long and they often experience dangerously high instability in their placements. It is too difficult for Kansas children in foster care to find permanency. Less than 17% of children attend the same school as they did prior to their entry into the foster care system.² The graduation rate for foster care kids who aged out of the system this fiscal year is only 16.4%.³

In order to come up with the best solutions for addressing this crisis, we need to have a more complete understanding of the challenges we are facing. Information regarding the details of a foster care child's experience in the education system is essential to tailoring the best response. The data that we do have makes it clear that kids are being failed by the system. Ending that failure will require a more complete picture, and SB 51 helps fill in the pieces.

¹ Strengthen Families Rebuild Hope. "Addressing the Foster Care Crisis in Kansas - Update: December 2019."
http://www.rebuildhopekansas.org/uploads/2/1/9/2/21929892/sfrh_2019_update_report.pdf

² Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Attending Same School Success Indicator FY 2021."
http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2021DataReports/FCAD_ContractOutcomes/Same%20School_Success%20Indicator_FY2021.pdf

³ Kansas Department for Children and Families. "Adults Ending Custody with the Secretary will have Completed Grade 12 SFY2021."
http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2021DataReports/FCAD_ContractOutcomes/Completed_grd12_FY2021.pdf

Racial disparities among kids in the foster care system are continuing to rise. In state fiscal year 2021, black children in Kansas were 2.08 times more likely than white children to be in foster care.⁴ This disparity in Kansas has risen every year since 2015.⁵ Given the known racial disparities among all kids in foster care, Kansas Appleseed believes gathering disaggregated subgroup data for racial and ethnic groups of foster kids in the education system will also be important

For these reasons, Kansas Appleseed urges passage of SB 51. Codifying the provisions put forward in Executive Order #20-53 will help ensure this measure of accountability for Kansas foster care kids remains in place.

⁴ Analysis by Kansas Appleseed using linear forecast of population from Census Bureau (<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2010-2019/state/asrh/sc-est2019-alldata5.csv>) and demographic data from DCF (<http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/FosterCareDemographicReports.aspx>)

⁵ Id.