

**Written Testimony:
House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care
January 24, 2024**

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Ousley, and Members of the House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care, thank you for the opportunity to write to you about SOUL Family Permanency (HB2536).

My name is Matt Stephens, and I currently serve as the Vice President of Advocacy for Saint Ministries. Saint Francis Ministries (SFM) is an independent not-for-profit that has served Kansas children and families since 1945. At Saint Francis, we remain committed to providing high-quality services and programs to meet the needs of Kansas children and families. Today, Saint Francis provides a continuum of services that include prevention, permanency case management (reintegration and adoption), foster care homes, and residential services. Saint Francis is the case management grantee for Areas 1, 2 and 7.

Saint Francis Ministries staff were honored to be included at the inception of the SOUL planning team and have actively participated since the group's formation. The SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option offers an innovative opportunity for youth in foster care. This new legal pathway for youth currently in care was designed by young leaders with lived experience. The value of their experience within the child welfare system cannot be overstated. These young leaders bring a depth of insight and knowledge that is unmatched.

Saint Francis Ministries believes that SOUL can be groundbreaking, as it increases youth voice in establishing their supportive circle of caring adults without severing legal ties with birth parents and siblings. Saint Francis Ministries asks you to fully consider any legislation that creates additional permanency options for youth in the foster care system, especially options created by those with lived experience.

Matt Stephens
Vice President of Advocacy