



**Neutral Testimony on HB 2554 – Written Only  
House Child Welfare and Foster Care Committee  
February 7, 2024**

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Ousley, and Members of the Committee, my name is Rachel Marsh, CEO of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is an association of 19 private, non-profit child welfare agencies that collectively provide a full array of services for children and families in child abuse and neglect prevention, human trafficking prevention, family preservation, foster care, adoption, independent living, and parent, youth, and child skill-building, mental health, and substance use treatment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2554.

The Children's Alliance currently works across multiple grants and partnerships to support strong and effective practices in kinship care in Kansas. We have worked in collaboration with youth, kinship caregivers, foster parents, case management providers, kin family advocates, and child placing agencies to identify critical training and support needs to ensure the best possible outcomes for youth in foster care related to kinship and relative placement and support practices. We are currently designing a workforce training course to support and educate case management providers on best practices with kinship families. And, we have completed a kinship "path" curriculum to provide on-demand, real-time, Kansas-specific training and support for kinship families. We are currently undergoing a thorough review of Kansas policies related to kinship care to bring future, Kansas-specific kinship policy recommendations to this legislature.

We appreciate the positive intent of HB2554 and see significant positive benefits to focusing on identifying and engaging relatives and others with close personal relationships with children at the beginning of placement out of home.

However, we see some aspects of this bill that need further work.

First, we believe kinship outreach should be more interwoven throughout the current Kansas child in need of care statutory scheme. For instance, should DCF engage with relatives before requesting a CINC petition be filed under KSA 38-2230? Should the district or county attorney provide information about possible family supports within a CINC petition under KSA 38-2234? Should the court review family support networks prior to issuing an ex parte order or a temporary custody order under KSA 38-2242 or KSA 38-2243 (when that is safely possible)? Should the court enter visitation orders more routinely under KSA 38-2255? There are multiple opportunities throughout the Kansas child in need of care code to meaningfully add concrete, systemic early identification and engagement with kinship families that we believe should be considered in any bill related to relative engagement.

Second, the bill duplicates extensive work already performed by DCF and case management providers using Family Finding tools that DCF adopted and implemented in recent years. We fear that the granular, extensive checklist of outreach, reporting, and documentation in HB2554 may move "best practice" of early engagement to more of a bureaucratic checklist. And, every time we give professional social

workers checklists of tasks, we risk de-professionalizing their work and pushing our workforce further away from wanting to work in the field of child welfare.

Third, HB2554 requires an extensive search into private records that currently we are unaware if DCF can or should be able to access; and case management providers simply don't have these databases. We would be interested to learn more about how these searches into private lives across extended family networks are practical and protect privacy.

Fourth, we strongly oppose New Section 1 (d)(6). Relatives may need time to build a relationship with a child. The parent may be actively working reintegration in one town and the relative live in another town hours away. Federal law may preclude a relative from serving as a placement. We acknowledge that the role of kin family in long-term placement is an important issue to this body (and to the Children's Alliance), but New Section 1(d)(6) does not reflect best practice in child welfare. A more delicate touch is necessary.

I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Rachel Marsh  
[rmarsh@childally.org](mailto:rmarsh@childally.org)  
(620) 951 4110

**Members of the Children's Alliance of Kansas:**

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