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Written Testimony in Support of HB 2554
House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care

Chair Concannon, Ranking Member Ousely and Members of the House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am writing in support of House Bill 2554, directing DCF to identify and notify relatives and persons whom a child in custody has close ties to for placement of the children.

Kansas Appleseed, has a long history of unwavering commitment to advocating for the rights and well-being of children, including improving our state's foster care system. HB 2554 establishes a robust process for DCF to identify and notify relatives and kinship caregivers when a child enters DCF custody. We support this bill because it helps ensure children in foster care are in stable, safe placements that improve their outcomes and success when they leave foster care.

When a child enters foster care, we know in most cases that a relative or kinship placement gives the child and their family the best chance at successful reunification while reducing the harm done to a child when they are removed from their homes. Research shows that children in foster care who are placed with relatives and kinship caregivers experience less trauma, higher placement stability, and improved behavioral outcomes compared to their peers in non-kinship placements.¹ This is because relative and kinship placements correlate with:

- Less adjustment to a new environment,
- Less likelihood of experiencing school disruptions,
- Less likelihood of experiencing behavioral and mental health problems associated with a new environment,
- Increased placement stability as children in relative and kinship placements are shown to have fewer placement moves and lower rates of re-abuse, and
- Increased likelihood of staying with their siblings and maintaining connections to their family.²

This bill will provide DCF and the state additional processes and tools to ensure children entering foster care have every opportunity to thrive by finding all potential relative and kinship placements.

In ensuring these processes are codified in state law, DCF can realize overall system improvements as well. The Settlement Agreement between DCF and plaintiffs in the *McIntyre*

¹ Winokur, M., Holtan, A., and Batchelder, K. E. "Kinship care for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children removed from the home for maltreatment." National Library of Medicine. 2014.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7386884/> and The Annie E. Casey Foundation. "What is Kinship Care?" 2023. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-kinship-care>

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation. "What is Kinship Care?" 2023. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-kinship-care>



lawsuit (2021) outlines crucial requirements to improve the child welfare system, including addressing failures in placement, improving mental health outcomes for children in foster care, and increasing placement instability. Further the federal government requires the state meet certain performance standards with regard to both placement stability and relative and kinship placements. Kansas is not meeting these standards at this time:

- Children in foster care are moved from placement to placement at higher rates than other states. A federal review of Kansas' system reveals that the state continues to decline in their ability to provide stable placements to children in foster care. Federal reviewers found that the number of moves a child experiences per 1,000 days in foster care has increased. Kansas children in foster care experience a rate of over 6 moves per 1000 days in care. Monitoring of DCF's performance for our settlement agreement with them confirmed these results.³
- A federal review also found that Kansas is not meeting standards on finding and notifying relative and kinship caregivers.⁴

Relative and kinship placements improve stability and outcomes for children. This bill addresses these larger systemic failings in the state's child welfare system and provides infrastructure to correct them.

Passing HB 2554 would signal a commitment to Kansas children and support their ability to thrive by exhausting all resources in finding relative and kinship placements—placements that increase the likelihood of success for the child and their family. Currently, 36% of all children in Kansas foster care are in a relative or kinship placement. This is an almost 10% increase since 2010.⁵ However, that means over half of all children coming into foster care are still not in familiar settings. If there is more we can do as a state to get children into the best possible placement for them, we should be doing it. I urge you to support HB 2554, and commit to improving outcomes and stability for all Kansas children.

³ Administration for Children and Families. "Child and Family Services Reviews: Kansas Final Report." 2023. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/ks-cfsr-r4-final.pdf> and Center for the Study of Social Policy. "McIntyre v. Howard: Progress Report, Period 2." 2023. <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/McIntyre-v.-Howard-Period-2-Progress-Report.pdf>

⁴ Administration for Children and Families. "Child and Family Services Reviews: Kansas Final Report." 2023. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/ks-cfsr-r4-final.pdf>

⁵ Kansas Appleseed analysis of DCF. Prevention and Protection Services Reports.