



**STATE OF KANSAS
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

KRIS W. KOBACH
ATTORNEY GENERAL

MEMORIAL HALL
120 SW 10TH AVE., 2ND FLOOR
TOPEKA, KS 66612-1597
(785) 296-2215 • FAX (785) 296-6296
WWW.AG.KS.GOV

**Proponent Testimony on HB 2629
House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care
February 12, 2024**

Representative Concannon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2629 on behalf of the State Child Death Review Board (SCDRB) and the Office of the Attorney General.

As a brief overview, the SCDRB was created by the Legislature in 1992 and is administered by the office of the Kansas Attorney General. The Board examines the circumstances surrounding all children under the age of 18 who die in Kansas, whether or not the child is a Kansas resident, as well as the deaths of any Kansas children (when notified) who die in another state. Board membership is established under K.S.A. 22a-243 and currently includes: one member each from the Office of the Attorney General (who serves as Chairperson), the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, the Department for Children and Families, the Department of Health and Environment, and the Department of Education; three members appointed by the Board of Healing Arts to include a district coroner, a pathologist, and a pediatrician; one representative of a child advocacy group appointed by the Attorney General; and one county or district attorney appointed by the Kansas County and District Attorneys Association.

On average, the Board reviews nearly 400 child deaths per year, which includes an analysis of medical records, law enforcement information, autopsy findings, social service history provided by the Department for Children and Families, school records, mental health records, and a variety of other pertinent information. Through the extensive and comprehensive reviews, the board is able to identify and understand the circumstances regarding the child at the time of their death. Through the analysis of compiled data, the board is able to identify patterns, trends, and risk factors related to the deaths to make recommendations such as modifying statutes, rules and regulations, and policies and procedures that lead to better outcomes for Kansas children.

As introduced, HB 2629 will modernize outdated language provided in K.S.A. 22a-242, 22a-243, and 22a-244, as well as codify current practices and notifications as it relates to coroners, the Kansas Department for Health and Environment, and the Department for Children and Families.

In addition to the general “cleanup” of the statute, HB 2629 has two provisions, both of which have a positive impact on board members. The first provision would authorize an additional

appointment from the Board of Healing Arts. This will add additional pediatric expertise for the review of child deaths as well as ensure that overall case assignment is at a manageable level for all appointed members of the Board. The second provision would allow for compensation for Board members to attend meetings, which is consistent with the practices of other state boards and addresses some barriers related to finding suitable appointments with the Board when the interested party lives several hours from the location of the monthly Board meetings.

Lastly, as introduced, HB 2629 will allow the Board to disclose statistics or conclusions for the purposes of procuring and maintaining financial grants. This added disclosure will allow the SCDRB to meet the federal funding requirements of existing grants as well as ensure competitive applications for future grant opportunities.

Not included in this bill is an additional request to amend K.S.A. 22a-243(j) to include the following language:

(10) the governor and legislature, if the information and records being disclosed are statistics or conclusions of the state review board and provided for the purpose of supplementing the state review board's annual report.

Currently, state statute restricts the SCDRB from disclosing conclusions or statistics outside of the Board's annual report, submitted to the governor and the legislature on or before October 1st of each year. The inclusion of this additional language would allow the Board to keep our annual report at a manageable length without having to limit the amount of information, statistics, and data we are able to report out.

In conclusion, the work of the SCDRB is commendable and needed to ensure that, as a state, we are aware of and responsive to the risk factors associated with child deaths. As written and with the additional amendment requested, House Bill 2629 is important to the overall success of the SCDRB.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Hortenstine
Division Chief, Youth Services
Executive Director, Kansas Child Death Review Board
Office of the Attorney General

Jane E. Weiler
Special Assistant Attorney General
Board Chair, Kansas Child Death Review Board
Office of the Attorney General