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**Informational Testimony on Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice
House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care
& House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice
Jan 18 2023 @ 1:30P Testimony**

Chair Concannon, Chair Owens, Vice Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Smith, Ranking Member Ousley, Ranking Member Highberger, and Members of the Committees, my name is Kristalle Hedrick, Vice President of Kansas Programs with FosterAdopt Connect (FAC). I obtained my Bachelor's Degree in Social Work in 2006 and Master's Degree in Social Work in 2008. Since this time, I have held a variety of positions with contracted child welfare agencies supporting children and their families who have been impacted by foster care. I was also a foster parent, and have had the privilege of adopting from foster care in Kansas.

During my time as a foster parent, our family took a placement of a sibling group of three ages 15, 12, and 2. The kids were in care due to allegations of abuse and neglect and the conditions of their home. These kids loved their parents, and were terrified to leave their home and family. When DCF was at the home with law enforcement the 15-year-old, a boy, began posturing and was throwing his pocket knife into a tree that happened to be relatively close to the DCF worker. Against the recommendations of our workers we took placement of all three kids, even the angry 15-year-old boy. We certainly slept with one eye open the first night, but we felt prepared to help support him through that anger and develop some healthier ways to express his frustration. He and his siblings ultimately went to reside with an aunt, where they safely remained until they reached permanency.

Fast forward a year, I was a Permanency Director in Southeast Kansas. My primary role was to support our team of child welfare professionals as they walked alongside families to help them heal, improve their circumstances, and provide a safe environment for their children to return home to. During my time in that role, we had a case in which a teen girl and her mother murdered a member of the community and conspired to do the same to their foster care case manager. I never imagined the support I would be offering to my staff would be sitting beside them as they met with detectives and law enforcement to make plans for keeping themselves and their own families safe. I also never imagined having to ask another worker to step into that role, and continue providing services to this juvenile offender and her mother.

Another year later, I was the Director of Adoption Services for the Eastern half of the state. I was in my office in Topeka when a peer rushed in asking for help. There was a young man downstairs who staff believed to have a firearm in his hoodie. My peer, the Permanency Director, presented me with two options – would you like to sit in the room with the youth or help get staff and other kids/families out of the building? I sat in a room with this youth for over 20 minutes waiting on law enforcement, whose office was less than 2 blocks away, to arrive and offer support.

In 2019, in Kansas City KS one of my staff members was assaulted by a teen boy who was awaiting placement in an office. When law enforcement arrived it took four officers to detain him. He attempted to gain access to their firearms and other defense tools, and it took several minutes for the officers to



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get him safely handcuffed and in their vehicle. Only hours after the initial assault to the foster care case manager who was on call at the time, Juvenile Intake called after they processed him, they were ready to release him back into her care.

There is a difference between a 15-year-old boy who is angry and scared to be moved away from his home and family and a young woman who has murdered another human, and has very intentional plans to kill another. Or a young man who is physically attacking and overwhelming a team of four trained law enforcement officers. Our child welfare workforce, and foster parents, are trained and equipped to help youth navigate through trauma and walk alongside them to develop healthier ways to cope. Our child welfare workforce, and our foster families are not equipped to deal with young people who are committing felony level crimes. Our child welfare system is not designed to serve youth with criminal behaviors and our state's most vulnerable children who have experienced abused and neglected and are in foster care to no fault of their own. Asking our workforce, and our foster families to serve both of these populations simultaneously as the system currently exists is to ask the impossible.

Being one of the first states to take advantage of the Family First Prevention Services Act, our state is well-positioned to be a leader in family well-being and prioritizing the safety of our children. But we must take action, the child welfare system is not able to meet the needs of youth with criminogenic cognitive distortions and conduct disorder diagnoses without support from the law enforcement and corrections community.

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2023 FosterAdopt Connect Kansas Legislative Priorities

Working in the trenches of the child welfare system can be just as difficult and confusing as it can be rewarding and life-giving. FosterAdopt Connect works with children, youth, and families as they navigate the complexities of the child welfare system.

With the help of innovative tools, dedicated professional staff, and over 20 years of experience working in the Kansas and Missouri foster care systems, we're equipped to connect children with families that provide love, healing, and stability for a brighter future.



FUND INNOVATIONS AND SUPPORTS NEEDED FOR YOUTH WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

Expand behavioral interventionist model for youth on the Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTF) waitlist throughout the state.



IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Ensure continuity in medical, behavioral health and support service for youth who have exited foster care.

An automatic Medicaid enrollment process plan for young adults under the age of 24.



FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT RETENTION, TRAINING, AND SUPPORT

Raise awareness of third party advocacy and support agencies available to families caring for children impacted by foster care.

CONTACT US

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