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Testimony in Support of House Bill 2151

**Presented to the House Committee on Children and Seniors
By Deputy Attorney General Steve Karrer**

February 3, 2021

Chair Concannon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt in support of House Bill 2151.

House Bill 2151 would create a Kansas elder and dependent adult abuse multidisciplinary team coordinator who would be required to establish a multidisciplinary team in every judicial district. This bill comes from the Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse Prevention Council (EDAAPC). The Council was formed in 2019 and one of its primary purposes was to research multidisciplinary teams, also known as MDTs, in the context of the investigation of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of elder and dependent adults.

Elder and dependent adult abuse often involves multiple types of abuse and contains social service, legal, medical, cognitive, and law enforcement components. There is also usually both a civil and criminal investigation ongoing at the same time. This requires coordination of several agencies, as well as an understanding of the capabilities of each agency.

The Council understands communication between agencies is often incomplete. It also understands elder and dependent abuse investigations can be complicated due to the nature of the offense. Often investigations require assistance from experts in fields such as banking, accounting, medicine, cognition, etc. These are often not easy to find especially in rural areas. For these reasons, the Council spent much of its time researching and understanding Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT).

The Council and its subcommittees reviewed MDT statutes from several other states. We also reached out to individuals in other states to get their opinion on the advantages and disadvantages of their statute. The goal of the Council is to establish a statute that promotes an MDT approach but allows for flexibility based on local needs and resources. The Council understands there is a vast difference in resources between urban and rural areas. Also, the types of cases are often different. Therefore, an urban MDT may ultimately need to look very different from a rural MDT.

Under HB 2151, law enforcement and state social service agencies will be able to meet and discuss complex cases of all types of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They will also be able to invite professionals from the medical, legal, financial, and advocacy fields as necessary to assist in their investigation. This will all be done while still maintaining the confidentiality necessary in such investigations.

In addition to serving as chair of EDAAPC, I have been a prosecutor for 20 years. I prosecuted child sexual abuse cases for many of those 20 years. Our state has a statute regarding multidisciplinary teams in that type of case. I participated in one of those such teams and can speak to the value of it. There were many times we were able to further an investigation after an MDT meeting, because of the information learned from a different agency or from an invited member such as a psychologist. Not only did this team enhance the investigation, they often were the reason the investigation was viable to prosecution.

I believe HB 2151 will bring this same benefit to the investigation and prosecution of elder and dependent adult abuse cases. It will increase communication among agencies, which is desperately needed and will also increase investigator's knowledge and understanding of elder and dependent adult abuse investigations.

For these reasons, on behalf of Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt and the Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse Prevention Council, I encourage you to report HB 2151 out of committee favorably.

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