

## Testimony to Support SB 204

March 18, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Committee,

Please except this written testimony in support of Senate Bill SB204, Protecting the total amount of time for visitation granted to a person under the revised Kansas code for care of children.

I am a Masters level Social Worker at HealthCore Clinic in Wichita, Ks, that currently coordinates the evidence-base, Strengthening Families Program and our goal is to give parent the tools to effectively communicate with their youth ages 10-14 in the areas of substance abuse, alcohol abuse, peer pressure, and promoting good behavior. I am very passionate about this program, because it gives parents in all situations the chance to learn new ways to interact with their children. This program caters to families of all kind regardless of socioeconomic status, we accept parents with children in the foster care system, because these children are not in the home, the parent will not get the chance to positively interact with their children. I have solicited social workers of these families to provide the means for these children to be at classes with their parent, that way the family engagement is structured and monitored. This also gives the social workers and facilitators the chance to see progress in the behavior of the parent and child before reintegration.

Receiving the total amount a time for visitations is essential for that family to interact and build on the time loss due to the child being removed from the home. According to the Kansas Prevention and Protection Services Family Handbook, a parent and their child have the right to reasonable contact, regardless of the case plan goal, unless restricted by the court. An essential part of the reintegration process, the parent and child will have at least one face-to-face interaction per week, with telephone contact, and unlimited mail unless it is determined not to be in the best interest of the child. These interactions may occur with the foster family and may be in their home.

The scheduled visits should not be cut short or taken for granted by the parent or the social worker. Every minute is critical in the reintegration process of that family. Protecting that time in visitations gives the social workers and the parents the means to assess their readiness for reintegration. As the time grows nearer to reintegrating the family visits should become more frequent and longer in duration. This is where I suggest attending the Strengthening Families program and having the children brought to the classes where parents and their children can interact and learn to communicate effectively. Visitations is the where parents get the least support, but where parents and children need the most support.

I personally have heard countless complaints from families, about how visitations were cancelled, without notice and not rescheduled, or shortened because the support worker was late. We have to acknowledge that these families have already been traumatized by the removal of their children from the home, and not be able to keep scheduled visits adds stress to an already stressful situation. Part of the job the social worker, support worker, or service worker of any kind is to support the entire family in the reintegration process, when we don't keep scheduled appointments it add insult to injury for the family. Visits that are loss or shorten for whatever reason, stifles the reintegration process.

HealthCore Clinic and the Strengthening Families Program support the families that we serve whole heartedly and will continue to advocate for the institution of the family. Feel free to contact me if you have any additional question or concerns. Thank you for your attention in this matter

Sincerely,

Vernetta Dixon, MSW

Behavior Health Consultant/ Program Coordinator