



## **Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight**

### **March 31, 2025**

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee,

I am Jeanette Owens, the Chief Child Welfare Officer at DCCCA. DCCCA has served Kansas communities, families, and children for 51 years. We provide child welfare programs including family preservation and child placing agency services. Additionally, we provide mental health and substance use disorder treatment, traffic safety, prevention, and research services. Thank you for the opportunity to share about our services today.

#### **Police Protective Custody (PPC)**

DCCCA's Child Placing Agency has received PPC referrals from Juvenile Intake and Assessment Centers for over twenty years. These children have been placed in PPC without an arrest or court order in an effort to provide protection to the children. PPCs typically are 72 business hours.

As a Child Placing Agency, we often receive referral calls throughout the evening and into the morning for children that are in PPC. Since January 1, 12 counties have contacted us for 60 children from the age of one day old to seventeen-years old. We were able to match 29 of the children to a DCCCA-sponsored foster home during their PPC time. The number of PPC referrals we receive varies significantly throughout the year, but on average, we estimate around 600 referrals annually with around 50-120 children placed into our foster homes during their PPC time.

DCCCA recognizes the significant impact that family separation has on children, and we support foster families caring for kids without much of the needed information to understand the child's needs. Often, we do not know the medical history of the child, for example, if there are environmental allergies or food and animal allergies. Often, it is not known who has put this child at risk or what the risks are. Frequently, the child has never experienced family separation before and may respond with new or different behaviors.

Foster families are provided with specific rules and procedures when they are caring for a child in PPC including:

- Children are not to attend school nor to participate in school functions or extra-curricular activities.
- The child should remain with the foster family and not go to daycare.
- The foster home must make sure they are available to be contacted at any time during the PPC.
- Children in PPC are not to have contact with anyone other than the foster family unless documented approval has been provided by the referring agency.

### **Continued Discussion and Brainstorming of New Actions and Tools:**

- Investing in a comprehensive study of the current practices, local relationships and processes.
- Comparing Kansas practice to the national best practice.
- Law enforcement having urgent access to other services such as DCF, Families First services, Family Preservation services, Family Resource Centers and others to make an urgent referral for intervention for the family.
- Explore how Juvenile Intake Assessment Centers might have additional resources and responsibilities to reduce family separation.
- Identifying funding for family safety support resources to increase access to safety planning and prevention of unnecessary family separation.
- The Department for Children and Families (DCF) provides access to an assessment and trainings for Law Enforcement. Training would include the 4 Questions work that asks:
  - What can we do to remove the danger instead of the child?
  - Can someone the child/family knows move into the home to remove the danger?
  - Can the caregiver and child go live with a relative or kin?
  - Could the child move temporarily to live with a relative or kin?

### **Community Referrals**

DCCCA believes that community referrals might be one tool to reduce PPC family separations. Creating an opportunity for law enforcement to make an urgent referral to services within the child welfare system could be a new tool for Kansas. For example, law enforcement could have an encounter with a family that may not need to be separated but does need timely intervention; thus, law enforcement could directly contact Families First, Family Preservation, Family Resource Centers and/or others to make an urgent referral.

In June of 2021, DCCCA began a pilot in our family preservation program to serve community referrals including self-referrals. DCCCA received 237 community referrals during the 24-month pilot. We received most of the pilot referrals from hospitals, schools, courts, treatment providers and self-referrals. This pilot allowed family preservation services

to occur without the family needing to be reported to the Kansas Protection Report Center for abuse or neglect. Families consistently share with us their willingness to seek services when it does not require further entry into the “system” and being reported to the Protection Report Center at the Department for Children and Families (DCF). Even though the contract for community referrals has ended and we have not marketed community referral options for well over a year, DCCCA staff continue to receive requests for community referrals frequently, at least weekly and occasionally multiple times a week.

Thank you for your time. We appreciate the invitation to join today’s conversation, and we appreciate the commitment to improving the lives of Kansas children.

Respectfully submitted,

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