



March 3, 2025

Testimonial in support of the appropriation for the O'Connell Children's Shelter in the Kansas Department of Corrections budget.

Submitted to Chairman Billinger, Vice Chair Claeys, and Ranking Minority Pettey, Senate Ways and Means Committee.

The O'Connell Children's Shelter provides a wide range of critically important programs to support foster families and kin.

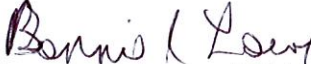
The Shelter offers a multitude of services to children, youth and families, not only in hopes of providing options if residential care is needed, but also the services and support to strengthen families so that system involvement – either as a Child in Need of Care, or as a Juvenile Offender – is not necessary. With three homes on the O'Connell Ranch property, and two homes in Lawrence, they are able to provide care for nearly 60 young people at any time.

The O'Connell Children's Shelter is nearing 50 years of service to Kansas children and their families and often serves as the lynchpin necessary to halt youth churning through placements in the foster care system. The funding they request would create new crisis beds in our Lawrence Family Service Center, where youth can receive necessary one-on-one care when other options are not successful, as well as funding for two social workers.

Executive Director Gina Meier-Hummel, former Secretary of the Kansas Department for Children and Families and Adjunct Professor of Social Work at Washburn University, is in her 33<sup>rd</sup> year serving at-risk Kansas families. She and her team, alongside an outstanding Board of Directors, are dedicated to helping these young people find a better future.

We are so grateful for the care and commitment provided by O'Connell Children's Shelter, and proud to provide this letter of support.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Bonnie S. Lowe, IOM  
President and CEO