



Senate Judiciary Committee
HB 2533 – Failure to report suspected child abuse
2012 Legislative Session

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

My name is Amy Boydston, Executive Director for the state network of Children's Advocacy Centers. Our Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) work with SRS and law enforcement agencies in more than 50 counties to coordinate joint investigations, forensic interviews of child victims, medical and mental health treatment immediately following a report of child sexual abuse, severe physical abuse and, at times, children witness to violence. ***We appear before the committee today in support of the intent of House Bill 2533.***

Our ability to serve abused children with this coordinated, child-centered response is dependent upon the initial identification and reporting of suspected child abuse to the appropriate authorities. The Kansas Children's Advocacy Centers support the intent of HB 2533 in expanding the scope of professionals mandated to report child abuse.

Nationally, three-fifths of reports of suspected child abuse are made by professionals who encounter the abused child as part of the professional's job. Given that more than 80% of perpetrators of child maltreatment are parents, where the abuse is hidden behind closed doors, it is essential that certain professionals be mandated by law to report suspected abuse or neglect. *(Citation below)*

While CACs unequivocally support the reporting of suspected child maltreatment - by any adult - we also note that efforts intended to increase reporting **must** be coupled with (1) training for reporters; (2) system capacity to handle those reports; and (3) clarification about reporting a child in immediate danger or threat of harm.

As you deliberate this bill there are several things we ask you to consider as **conditions of successful implementation.**

(Training) Equally important to laws requiring reports to be made is the reporter's ability to first recognize the signs and symptoms of child maltreatment and to understand his/her legal obligation. We ask that you consider whether this bill adequately addresses the support needed by potential reporters. A critical piece of this bill should be making certain mandated reporters are informed of their legal obligation and are trained to recognize child abuse indicators. If passed, we would encourage the convening of a team of relevant stakeholders - including Children's Advocacy Centers - to plan and implement statewide efforts to notify mandated reporters of these changes and to create plans to provide customized training to mandated reports from different professional fields.

(Capacity) It is clear that passage of this bill will increase reporting to an already strained response system. With only two SRS call centers, we implore the legislature to work with SRS leadership to monitor that call centers are adequately staffed with specially trained and supervised personnel to receive and thoroughly screen the reports for assignment. In addition, we hope that lawmakers will monitor the impact of report volume and ensure resources are in place to meticulously investigate and respond to the allegations.

Our Children's Advocacy Centers have become a critical component of the front-line response to abuse reports. In the past four years, the number of children coming through the doors of CACs after referrals from SRS or law enforcement has more than doubled to nearly 3,800 children each year. This session, our Centers have already asked for restoration of lost funding so that we are available to provide child-centered forensic interviews, victim advocacy, medical care and mental health treatment.

(Imminent harm) As a final point of clarification, while the bill directs the reporting of child abuse to SRS during business hours, please consider language making it clear that, **if a child is in immediate danger or threat of harm, reports may be made to law enforcement for an emergency response.** In its current form, the bill only directs the reporter to law enforcement after business hours.

The recent action of the legislature and policy makers demonstrates considerable interest in addressing child abuse in our state. We thank you for taking up this important issue and would like Children's Advocacy Centers to be part of the dialog as state leadership continues to look at ways to combat child abuse in our state.

Respectfully submitted by the Kansas Chapter of Children's Advocacy Centers,

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Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2011). *Child Maltreatment 2010*. Available at www.childwelfare.gov