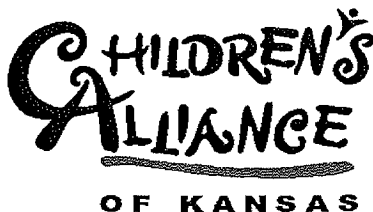


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Senate Bill 169

**Senate Education Committee
Written Testimony**

The Children's Alliance is the association of nonprofit child welfare agencies in Kansas. Our members work with children and families providing emergency care, foster care and residential services to children in the state's custody. Children are placed in the custody of the state for different reasons but one of the most frequent reasons for younger children coming into care is child abuse or neglect. These children are sitting in public school classrooms throughout the state.

School plays an important role in the lives of most children in foster care. For every child, education is critical to successful transition to adulthood. For children in foster care, positive relationships with supportive teachers, school-based counselors and classmates can offer a measure of protection from the disruption and uncertainty associated with out-of-home placement.

Numerous studies have confirmed that foster children struggle more in school than do children in the general population. The educational deficits of foster children are already reflected in higher rates of grade retention; lower scores on standardized tests; and dropout rates.

What are the causes of these educational outcomes? First, most of the children in foster care bear the scars of physical and emotional trauma, such as prenatal exposure to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; parental abuse, neglect and abandonment; exposure to violence in their homes and communities; and separation from their birth families. These experiences place children at great risk of developing physical, emotional and behavioral disorders that interfere with learning.

We commend the Governor and this committee for tackling such an important issue. Grade level proficiency in reading is obviously just as crucial for these children. But we fear this bill doesn't accommodate the special circumstances of the children we serve. While many children who are in state custody in 3rd grade, or who have been in state custody before 3rd grade, have an IEP and may be

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receiving special education services, there are others who do not have IEP's and would not meet the exemptions of this bill. For these children, family trauma may disrupt their ability to perform on a standardized test. Their circumstances may also result in poor school performance that is not indicative of their true educational ability. For these students, grade level retention could have not only an adverse impact.

At a minimum, we ask that the committee include an additional exemption for children who are in state custody during their 3rd grade year or who have been in state custody in prior school years. The special circumstances for this category of student must be considered, and decisions on retention should be left to the support team that is working with the child.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this concern with the committee.

Bruce Linhos
Executive Director