

Cynthia A. Schendel, LCSW
Individual & Relationship Therapy
Adults, Children & Adolescents

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Honorable Chair and Members of the Senate Committee on Correction and Juvenile Justice:

My name is Cynthia Schendel. I am a lifelong Kansan and a Clinical Social Worker in private practice, serving adults, children and adolescents. Earlier in my career I was a Juvenile Probation Officer and a School Social Worker, and I also worked with adult probationers and parolees in 2 different addictions treatment programs. For the past 22 years I have continued to serve children and adolescents with all kinds of mental health and addictions issues as an outpatient therapist, many of whom have become involved in the juvenile justice system. I am writing to urge you not to endorse the Governor's executive order (ERO 42) to place the Juvenile Justice Authority under the adult Dept. of Corrections in Kansas. The primary reason for my concern is that the brains of children and adolescents are fundamentally different than those of adults and they therefore must be treated differently.

1. Many other aspects of the law acknowledge the fact that children and adolescents are more vulnerable and need special protection, such as the child welfare system, mandatory public education and child labor laws, prohibitions against alcohol and tobacco use by children, and the purchase of guns and driving automobiles.
2. The Neuroscience of the past 20 years has proven definitively that **children are not adults**. They do not have adult judgment, adult impulse control, adult reasoning ability or adult emotional management. The experiences they have, including how the state treats them when they break the law, actually shape how their brains develop. Placing children and adolescents who break the law under the care and control of the adult DOC is therefore completely inappropriate and will decrease the safety and security of those Kansas children.
3. The Post-Audit report which Gov. Brownback cites as his reason for trying to force this change did not recommend this consolidation at all, but gave specific recommendations to correct the safety, security and care issues at the detention centers (see attached). Those concerns affect only about 300 of the 1500 children currently involved in the juvenile justice system. The state should fund and implement those recommendations instead of turning the whole system over to the DOC which is not equipped to deal with the special needs of children and adolescents.
4. Trying to fill the revenue deficit created by the current administration on the backs of Kansas children as young as 10 years old is not right and will effect generations to come. Do the right thing – keep Kansas children who break the law in a separate system designed to prevent adult criminality, instead of an adult system designed primarily to punish.

5. A change of this magnitude should be subject to the democratic process, not dictated by a temporary state official. The legislature wisely rejected this proposal last year and should not allow the Governor to overrun their judgment now.

Please contact me with any question or concerns at my office (913 451 1900), my cell phone (913 558 2886) or my e-mail, caslscsw@gmail.com Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia A. Schendel, LSCSW

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