

Testimony on HB 2577
To the Kansas House Appropriation Committee
By LeEtta J. Felter
3 February 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is LeEtta Felter, and I come before you to implore you to reject the recommendations in the budget that call for eliminating the Children's Initiative Fund and the Kansas Endowment for Youth, and move existing programs under the department of education. As a current member of the Children's Cabinet (appointed by Governor Brownback), and a fellow elected official serving my second term on the Olathe Public Schools Board of Education, I would like to share my great concern that the proposed changes place these vitally important, life changing programs at risk.

My sweet grandmother was a firm believer in the "envelope" budgeting system. Granddad was a pastor and Grandmother a piano teacher so money was tight their entire lives, but Grandmother believed that the envelope system "protected" the money that was in the envelope so that it would only be spent on the intended purpose. When my grandparents chose to make sure something was a priority, they designated a specific envelope for the purpose and tucked money into it with great discipline and regularity, and wouldn't touch it for anything else.

Since 1999 the state of Kansas has had an "envelope" for the children and families of Kansas. Into this envelope the state has directed the tobacco settlement dollars to protect and prioritize the money to be used to improve the health and well being of at-risk Kansas children and families. In addition to creating an "envelope" where money is placed, the Kansas Children's Cabinet was created and charged to review, assess, and evaluate all uses of the moneys in the "envelope". This envelope system has worked well and throughout the years since it's establishment Kansas has been held up as a shining example of a visionary state that understands the value of early and consistent investment in the children and families of Kansas.

I want to thank you for your service to the great state of Kansas. The lofty work you are doing impacts the future of Kansas. I come before you to ask that you maintain the "envelope" system that has protected the tobacco settlement dollars from being included in the general fund where they would be susceptible to cuts and sweeps.

Data show that one of the most effective strategies for economic growth is investing in at-risk young children and their families. The short-term costs are more than offset by the immediate and long-term benefits through reduction in the need for special education and remediation, better health outcomes, reduced need for social services, lower criminal justice costs and increased self-sufficiency and productivity among families. The most recent efficiency study that was commissioned by the legislature indicates the Kansas Children's Cabinet's comprehensive service delivery system, founded on public/private partnerships, is providing a tremendous 77% return on investment.

The envelope system worked well for my grandparents. On their modest income they were able to raise three amazing children and to help them pay for their college by directing money consistently into the designated envelope and refusing to touch it for any other purpose. Grandmother's envelope system worked long ago, and it still works today! I ask you to maintain the protections currently provided by the Kansas Children's Cabinet's oversight of the KEY and CIF funds. Keep the money in the appropriate "envelope" to make sure that it is there for the most vulnerable who live among us.