

STATE OF KANSAS

SENATE

14TH DISTRICT
STATE CAPITOL
TOPEKA, KS 66612
(785) 296-7678
forrest.knox@senate.ks.gov



17120 UDALL RD.
ALTOONA, KS 66710
(785) 783-5564
senatorforrestknox@gmail.com

FORREST J. KNOX

Senate Standing Committee on Judiciary

Testimony Supporting SB 410

February 11, 2016

Chairman King,

Is foster care in Kansas adequate?

Background - This past interim, the Special Committee on Foster Care Adequacy was established to study this question. The tasks assigned the committee included:

- Study the proper selection of foster parents and *the qualifications of foster parents*; and
- Review the *duties of those individuals responsible for foster children*.

A committee recommendation was: *In considering the best interest of a child, evidence-based peer-reviewed research on family structure be considered a high priority in making foster care placement decisions.*

A quote from testimony –

“We need homes waiting on children, instead of children waiting on homes,”

The Kansas code for the care of children; Chapter 38, Article 22 states that the policies of the state are to;

- “*Consider the safety and welfare of a child to be paramount...*”
- “Provide for the protection of children who have been subject to physical, mental or emotional abuse.”

People who work with children in need of care in Kansas tell me that *the system is broken*. National leaders tell me that what we’re doing now in America *is not working*. Most believe foster care in Kansas is not adequate. This is not an indictment of all foster homes in Kansas. Many are doing a good job. But we don’t have enough of these homes.

We need to have enough homes available that we can pick the home that will best meet a certain child’s needs, *matching the home to the child*. That child needs a home *in his community*, where he can keep attending *his own school*. That child needs a home of *similar culture* to his home. That child needs a

home where his safety and welfare is of paramount concern. We don't have this today. Kids are often placed in communities and in schools far from their homes, in cultures they don't understand.

We need many families stepping up to open their homes, because they want to help kids.

Frankly, we have too many professional foster homes, making a business out of fostering children. And, we have too many childless parents wanting babies to foster to adopt. What we need are foster parents *whose primary objective is not their own needs*, but to meet the needs of these children. Real parents love their kids, and meet their kids' needs, above their own interests. They raise their kids to grow up and leave the nest.

What CINC kids have lost is their home, their parents, and their stability. They have been taken, usually suddenly and unexpectedly, from the only home they have known. They have been abused or neglected; physically, emotionally, sexually. Often this has been because of substance abuse in the home, by the parent(s). They have lost all stability in their lives, all security.

What they need are loving parents and the security they provide. They don't need the court, or a judge. They don't need lawyers. They don't need a social worker's visit once a month or a CASA worker's visit. While all these may very well be necessary for the system to work, the kids need parents. Foster parents are the only persons in the system that could step in as interim parents.

Presently, foster parents are treated as babysitters. I've heard many such stories from foster parents, that if they love their foster kids and try to do what is right for them and advocated for their foster kids, if they get too outspoken, the kids are taken from them. The system won't allow them to love the kids. The system is afraid that they will get too attached, so the kids are moved to a new placement.

Many foster parents, when they learn this, quit, or never begin. I believe this is why many families will not even consider being foster parents.

SB 410 is a completely different approach, intended to get more people to step up and volunteer to help kids. It is my belief that if people had the correct knowledge, training, and skills; and they had the authority and freedom to actually make a difference in a child's life, to parent the child; then many Kansas homes would be willing to sacrifice to help kids.

SB 410 would enable the DCF Secretary to structure such a pilot program.

CARE homes are homes that do not exhibit the typical problems that existed in the homes where the kids came from: homes with two people to help guide the children, where one is always there to help, not working outside the home, where substance abuse, or the presence of addictive substances, is just not part of the equation, where a good, loving marital relationship exists, where education is important and parents are a part of this, and where the family is a part of a larger community and the support it gives.

SB 410 does not change the present foster care system in any way.

This is about meeting the needs of vulnerable children in Kansas who have lost their families.

I ask for your support of SB 410 and that the committee pass it out favorably.