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In Opposition to House Bill 2687
Committee on Federal and State Affairs**

March 18, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 2687.

The Kansas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (KNASW) is the professional association working on behalf of the profession and practice of social work in Kansas. Social workers have been licensed at three levels of practice since 1976. Social Workers practice at the baccalaureate (LBSW), the master (LMSW), and the independent clinical social worker (LSCSW). We are the largest group of mental health providers with over 7000 social workers practicing in the majority of the 105 counties in Kansas. We work in both the public and private sectors of the economy. Social workers serve thousands of Kansans every day.

We believe that all children have a right to permanent, continuous and nurturing relationship. We believe this is critical for all children in Kansas and oppose any legislative action which would delay, slow or deny a child access to a loving, permanent home. With a record number of children in state custody, we need all qualified families who are willing and able to provide a supportive, stable home for children in need.

Social Work Code of Ethics

Social workers are expected to follow the profession's standards of practice and can be disciplined when they willingly or knowingly choose to not uphold professional ethics and standards. Social workers have a responsibility to challenge discrimination under our Social Work Code of Ethics.

We are obligated to relieve, reduce, and not cause harm. No matter what personal religious beliefs we as social workers hold, our decisions must be guided by the best interest of the child.

Social workers don't have the right to practice our personal beliefs in professional settings at the expense of a client's well-being. Social workers must at all times defer to clients' values and beliefs, and thus keep the focus on the child. While HB 2687 would not directly impact the profession of social work, it negatively affects our top priority -- the Kansas children we serve.

Best Interest of the Child

The "best interest of the child" is a standard for decisions and a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions or courts of law. The research on this issue has been overwhelming clear - limiting access to adoption is counter to the best interest of children. Under this approach, children are most likely to flourish in families that provide love, security and support whatever their family structure. Prejudice and discrimination are harmful for children.

What research does tell us:

1. Extended time in foster care without a permanent family results in ongoing trauma for children and impacts ongoing behavioral and emotional problems.
2. Long periods of time in foster care are associated with greater risks of remaining in foster care without ever being adopted.

Kansas's foster care system is stretched beyond capacity and faces real challenges. Any legislative action that would delay, stall, or deny a child access to a family stands in opposition to helping children grow and develop, and achieve their capabilities to the maximum extent possible.

I urge you to reject this legislation and focus on changes to improve our foster care system so more kids can spend less time in foster care and be reunited with their families or get adopted more quickly into a loving family.

Kansas children in foster care deserve solutions to the real problems our system faces.