

February 16, 2021

RE: HB 2345

To whom it may concern,

I would like to testify in writing to the need for independent oversight for our foster care system, and encourage the passage of the Office of the Child Advocate bill.

My husband and I were previously licensed through KVC to be foster parents in Kansas. Throughout the time of our licensure, there were often months that would go by without in-person visits from our assigned social worker. We mostly offered respite care to children for shorter periods of time. However, it was clear to us that these children have very little in the way of advocacy. When we would care for these children they often wouldn't know who was picking them up or where they were going. I can imagine that they wouldn't have a great opportunity to bring issues to the light, especially when they are young.

There is no one more vulnerable in our community than foster children and whatever additional support, be it small or mighty, that can be granted is both deserved and warranted to protect these children. The tragedy that they be placed outside of their origin home at all is sufficient, but to also expose these children to potential abuses within the system is unconscionable. **There must be better mechanisms to research complaints made by or on behalf of children in care.** It is our duty to provide any and every measure that would allow for safer care, and independent oversight is critical.

However, it's also critical that the bureaucracy associated with becoming and remaining a foster parent is not so mired and dense as to discourage kind, thoughtful and caring people from participating in the system.

It is my hope that the OCA would fill a critical role in further protecting our community's children.

Thank you for your attention.

Kylie Brewer