



**Opponent Testimony on SB301
Senate Judiciary Committee
March 23, 2021**

Chair Warren, Vice Chair Wilborn, Ranking Member Haley, and Members of the Committee, my name is Denise Cross, President & CEO of Cornerstones of Care. Cornerstones of Care is a behavioral health organization providing prevention, treatment and support services to children and their families. The children that we serve have all experienced some kind of trauma through no fault of their own. Trauma resulting from abuse or neglect, witnessing or experiencing violence in their community or from being separated from a loved one. I am proud to share that Cornerstones of Care is certified in trauma informed care by the Sanctuary Institute. This model guides our approach to recognizing, understanding and responding to the trauma children and families have experienced.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill and for the opportunity to share our concerns about SB301 with you today. The Children's Alliance supports the sections of SB301 related to the Joint Committee on Child Welfare oversight. However, we have concerns with the construct around the Office of Child Advocate (OCA) proposed in SB301, and therefore we do not support SB301 on balance.

The child welfare system is complex and can be confusing, sometimes leading to barriers for children, parents, and relatives in knowing what to expect when they become involved in the system. We believe there is a vital role for a child welfare ombudsman to help children, parents, relatives, foster parents, and even case managers navigate this complex system. We have consistently supported this approach to improving the child welfare system, however, we believe SB301 overly complicates the Office of Child Advocate's role and could even create inconsistencies between current state codes and statutes.

We hope the committee will continue work on creating an independent resource to support children and families in our State.

Respectfully submitted,
Denise Cross, President & CEO
Cornerstones of Care