

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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JARROD L. OUSLEY
24TH DISTRICT

March 22, 2021

Thank you to the committee, thank you Chairman.

While I have worked in support of a Joint Committee on Child Welfare oversight and have worked specifically towards the Office of a Child Advocate as present in multiple other states, there are several significant flaws in Senate Bill 301 before you, that will lend themselves to overreach and abuse that would be detrimental for children in state custody, and I therefore rise in opposition of it today, and refer you to the work of the Committee on Children and Seniors in the House, that unanimously passed HB 2345, with appropriate safeguards, oversight, and respect for other long standing regulations as they relate to child welfare.

SB301 includes language that expands government authority in matters outside the scope of child welfare, including investigatory and subpoena powers of any Kansas resident without a critical nexus to a child, unchecked authority to seize materials, including in cases in which no Child in Need of Care case is open.

Additionally, multiple aspects of SB301 create inconsistencies between the Kansas Child in Need of Care Code (CINC), the Juvenile Offender Code (JO) and other Kansas statutes, meaning that hoped-for support for improved education, information, and navigation may be impossible. HB 2345 was drafted with language from the CINC and JO codes in order to avoid these inconsistencies that are necessary in order to ensure the rights of children and families are protected.

SB301 would grant this version of the Office of the Child Advocate more power over families' lives than any other current oversight, be it criminal or civil, and rather than addressing concerns with the Government Agencies and their treatment of children in State Custody, empowers political operatives' power without that is simply unnecessary and to provide the ombudsman duties as performed in other states.

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In the wrong hands, the political powers granted to the appointee under SB 301's structure could be used to create further harm to the vulnerable families most likely to experience interactions with the state, rather than observing and creating positive improvements to the state system as well.

I strongly encourage the committee to amend this bill, to substitute it or HB 2345, that has been crafted with input from Children Advocates, the Judiciary, and has bi-partisan and broad support in the House.

Thank you, and I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

State Representative
Jarrod Ousley
House District 24