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Testimony Regarding the State Child Death Review Board Annual Report

**Presented to the Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight
By Senior Assistant Attorney General Melissa G. Johnson, Chair, State Child Death Review Board**

November 17, 2022

Representative Concannon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the continuing work of the State Child Death Review Board. As a brief overview, since 1994, the State Child Death Review Board has reviewed over 12,000 deaths of Kansas children and/or children from out of state that died within the State of Kansas. As announced in our annual report, which was published last month and is available on our website at www.ag.ks.gov/scdrb, Kansas had 365 child fatalities in 2020. Those deaths were categorized by the Board as follows:

- 197 Natural Deaths – Prematurity, Congenital Conditions, Cancer and Other Disease
- 63 Unintentional Deaths – Motor vehicle crashes, Asphyxia and Other Non-Intentional Deaths
- 22 Homicides – Criminal acts including Child Abuse and Gang Related deaths
- 26 Suicides – Children taking their own life
- 57 Undetermined – Sleep related unexpected infant deaths or based on the available information, the Board was unable to determine the cause of death

Among other information, the 2020 annual report notes that:

- Males accounted for more deaths in nearly all age groups and comprised 59% of all child deaths in 2020.
- In 2020, two children were positive for COVID-19 at the time of death. One child had no symptoms of COVID-19 and the other had contributing factors including an unsafe sleep environment, which resulted in the Board classifying that case as an Undetermined- Sudden Unexpected Infant Death. The other death was classified as a natural death due to complications of COVID-19.
- There were 11 fentanyl deaths in 2020, and no fentanyl deaths in the previous four years. There was one methamphetamine death in 2020, compared to three deaths in 2019.
- The suicide death rate continued to drop during 2020 from the highest rate in 2018 but still remains high.

The legislative priorities established by the Board for the next session include two items:

- Improvement to the Child Welfare System to include medical evaluations for children when there are concerns of child abuse by a child abuse pediatrician or other pediatric health professional with specialized training.
- Changes to Child Care Licensing Laws to provide for increase monitoring for compliance with current law as well as increased penalties and prosecution.

I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee members may have.