



February 15, 2023

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Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
Written Testimony in Support of SB 232
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 232, which would codify an Office of the Child Advocate into law. Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the belief that Kansans, working together, can build a state full of thriving, inclusive, and just communities. We use data, research, and direct work with impacted Kansans to guide our policy advocacy.

Kansas Appleseed supports SB 232 and offers suggestions to improve this legislation.

1. SB 232 specifies in New Section 2 that “No former or current executive or manager of any program or agency or contracting agency subject to oversight by the office may be appointed to the position of the child advocate within six months of that individual's period of service with such program or agency.” This provision is well-intentioned and we support preventing a revolving door between the Office of the Child Advocate and the agencies and contractors over which the office provides oversight. However, six months does not represent a significant barrier to the potential conflicts that this provision aims to prevent. Kansas Appleseed recommends that the time period be significantly longer than six months to address this potential conflict.
2. SB 232 does not include a provision of necessary requirements ensuring that the Child Advocate has relevant expertise in child welfare. One such provision that can be found in previous legislation on this topic which specified that the Child Advocate “shall be a person that either holds a current relevant license that would authorize the individual to work as a licensed professional as a case manager, behavioral health professional or attorney for a child in need of care or has seven or more years of experience in the field of child welfare.” Kansas Appleseed recommends that SB 232 be amended to include a provision of necessary requirements ensuring the Child Advocate has relevant expertise in child welfare.
3. SB 232 is somewhat vague as it relates to contractors. Kansas Appleseed recommends that New Section 5 be amended to make clear that retaliation protections apply to contractors as well as department and agency employees.



Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 232 today and offer our organization's suggestions to improve this legislation. The children of Kansas deserve the strongest, most independent Office of the Child Advocate that we all can imagine and we look forward to continuing the work with you to codify this important tool into law this year, and to continue our work to protect our children and improve our child welfare system for many years to come.

Kansas Appleseed urges you to consider our recommendations and pass SB 232 favorably.