

Report of the Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight to the 2025 Kansas Legislature

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Susan Concannon

VICE-CHAIRPERSON: Senator Beverly Gossage

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER: Representative Jarrod Ousley

OTHER MEMBERS: Senators Molly Baumgardner, Renee Erickson, Oletha Faust-Goudeau, Cindy Holscher, and Kristen O’Shea; and Representatives Leah Howell, Cyndi Howerton, Susan Humphries, Timothy Johnson, and Susan Ruiz

CHARGE

Review the Child Welfare System

Pursuant to KSA 46-3901, the Committee is directed to review:

- Data on child maltreatment and demographic trends impacting the child welfare system;
- The duties, responsibilities, and contributions of the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), the Department of Corrections, law enforcement, and the Judicial Branch that comprise and impact the child welfare system;
- The programs, services, and benefits offered directly or through grants or contracts by DCF, KDADS, KDHE, and the Judicial Branch that impact children and families at risk of becoming involved in the child welfare system;

- Trends, performance outcomes, activities, and improvement plans related to the federal Child and Family Services review;
- Reports from child welfare-related groups;
- Implementation of the 2019 Child Welfare System Task Force report recommendations;
- Reports on concerns received from the DCF Ombudsman or customer service department or similar office;
- Data and trends on family foster home licenses issued pursuant to KSA 2024 Supp. 65-516(b);
- The exception to the State Child Death Review Board confidentiality for city or county entities with the express purpose of providing local review of child deaths (KSA 2024 Supp. 22a-243); and
- Any other topic the Committee deems appropriate.

Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight

ANNUAL REPORT

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight (Committee) makes the following recommendations to the 2025 Legislature:

- Case management providers (CMPs) should report at each Committee meeting the number of positions in their organizations filled at that time by unlicensed individuals;
- School districts, CMPs, and the Department for Children and Families (DCF) should take a multi-pronged approach in notifying foster youth of any financial or educational benefits that may be available to them after reaching the age of 18 or graduating;
- Literacy assessments should be required for every child adjudicated to be in need of care;
- Bench cards used by judges and attorneys practicing in child in need of care (CINC) cases should include questions verifying that the guardian *ad litem* assigned in the case has met with the child;
- When a foster youth has a change in placement that requires enrollment in a new school, CMPs need to ensure such enrollment is timely;
- Law enforcement officers should provide written information to parents regarding what is to be expected in the 72 hours following a police protective custody (PPC) removal;
- Legislation providing additional resources to law enforcement with respect to PPC removals should be supported;
- The Committee should develop a list of questions standardizing the minimum quarterly reporting requirements for family preservation and case management provider (CMP) grantees;
- Legislative staff should inform the family of A.J. Iverson of the process for filing a claim against the State with the Joint Committee on Special Claims Against the State;
- The House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care or successor committee should hold informational hearings on the following topics: 1) legislative reforms pertaining to the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect 2) consideration of legislation granting *Miranda* rights for parents involved with the child welfare system; and 3) whether out-of-state child custody orders are being honored by Kansas courts;
- Kinship care placements should be made as early as possible and legislation considering a child's attachment to kinship caregivers when granting adoptions should be supported;

- DCF should shorten the timelines by which foster youth must receive mental health treatment, and the Committee should consider possible enforcement mechanisms to accomplish this goal;
- DCF should ask contractors to record details pertaining to youth who miss mental health treatment appointments at certified community behavioral health clinics, including the reason for the missed appointment and how frequently appointments are being missed, and compile this data for reporting to the Committee;
- Kansas universities with social welfare programs should present information to the Committee regarding their individual efforts to encourage students to pursue careers in child welfare;
- The State Child Death Review Board should provide education to the general public on safe firearm storage;
- The House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care or successor committee should prioritize the consideration of legislation amending the definition of “neglect” in the CINC Code;
- The House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care or successor committee should consider DCF’s legislative priorities as presented to the Committee at its November 2024 meeting.

Proposed Legislation: None.

BACKGROUND

HB 2158, enacted in 2021 and codified at KSA 46-3901, established the Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight (Committee), composed of 13 members, and charged the Committee to review:

- Data on child maltreatment and demographic trends impacting the child welfare system;
- The duties, responsibilities, and contributions of the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), the Department of Corrections, law enforcement, and the Judicial Branch that compose and impact the child welfare system;
- The programs, services, and benefits offered directly or through grants or contracts by DCF, KDADS, KDHE, and the Judicial Branch that impact children and families at risk of becoming involved or who are involved in the child welfare system;
- Trends, performance outcomes, activities, and improvement plans related to the federal Child and Family Services Reviews;
- Reports from child welfare-related groups;
- Implementation of the 2019 Child Welfare System Task Force report recommendations;
- Reports on concerns received from the DCF Ombudsman or customer service department or similar office;

- Data and trends on family foster home licenses pursuant to KSA 2024 Supp. 65-516(b);
- The exception to the State Child Death Review Board confidentiality for city or county entities with the express purpose of providing local review of child deaths (KSA 2024 Supp. 22a-243); and
- Any other topic the Committee deems appropriate.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

The Committee met once during the 2024 Legislative Session, on March 15. The Legislative Coordinating Council authorized the Committee to meet four additional days in the 2024 Interim. The Committee held meetings on June 26, September 11, and November 13-14.

March 15 Meeting

Presentation on Strengthening Policies and Oversight of Child Welfare

A representative of Casey Family Programs presented information on how rates of maltreatment, entry and re-entry into foster care, and substantiated allegations of abuse, neglect, or both in Kansas compare with those rates nationally, and how those rates reflect the performance of a state's child protection system. The representative suggested two opportunities for legislative action: leveraging the Family First Prevention Services Act and evaluating the state's definition of child neglect.

Child Welfare System Presentations from Individuals, Providers, and Organizations

Testimony was presented by two private citizens:

- The sister of an individual who passed away while receiving family preservation services from Saint Francis Ministries (SFM) expressed her frustration that the testimony she presented at the October 4, 2023 meeting was not captured in the livestream recording (A family friend read

this statement on the sister's behalf due to illness.); and

- The mother of the individual described above described the impact the loss of her son has had on her family, and expressed her belief that her son would still be alive if the State had provided him the treatment he needed.

Kansas Division of the Child Advocate Update

The Child Advocate presented the Kansas Division of the Child Advocate (KDCA) annual report noting specific recommendations from the report. She also provided a review of the complaints KDCA received in 2023. The Child Advocate stated the most common complaints received have involved family separations and inadequate communication between families and DCF and case management providers (CMPs).

Case Management in Sedgwick County

A representative of EmberHope Connections (EHC), the CMP beginning case management of foster care in Sedgwick County on July 1, 2024, described the organization's efforts to transfer case management services from SFM.

DCF Update

The Secretary for Children and Families (Secretary) provided a status update on the three requests for proposal (RFPs) that were pending at the October 4, 2023, meeting. New contracts for family preservation services were awarded to existing providers, and an additional contract was awarded to EHC to provide case management services in Sedgwick County. The Secretary explained that these contracts will begin July 1, 2024, and will run through June 30, 2028, with an option to renew for an additional two years. The Secretary noted the RFP for the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System was still in process, but the agency expected to announce the vendor awarded the contract in April 2024.

The Secretary also reported on four items as requested by the Committee in its last meeting of 2023: the current status of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders screenings in the state, what is being done to address children living in homeless

encampments, what policies utility companies have to avoid terminating services to families with children, and what grant funding is available for nonprofits that support children with disabilities.

Presentation on KanCoach and Resilience Alliance Programs

Two representatives of the Children’s Alliance of Kansas presented an overview of the KanCoach and Resilience Alliance programs implemented by a public-private-university collaborative to enhance training for child welfare professionals and provide strategies for those working in child welfare to manage the stress and trauma inherent in this field.

Case Management and Family Preservation Provider Updates

A representative of Cornerstones of Care provided an update of organization statistics and activities related to staffing, caseloads, and new programs.

A representative of DCCCA provided an update on services and programs currently offered by the organization, and noted Medicaid will begin covering certain behavioral health services provided by the organization soon, which will help address barriers to treatment. The representative also noted the organization is working to improve staff retention.

A representative of KVC Kansas (KVC) provided an update on the organization’s operations, including entry rates, caseloads, and employee retention rates. The representative noted KVC participates in the KanCoach program.

A representative of SFM provided an update on the organization’s programs, employee recruitment and retention efforts, and statistics related to the types of permanency established for children in the organization’s care. The representative expressed his opinion that the State needs to improve the ratio of children entering care to those exiting care, and noted more frequent court hearings would help.

A representative of TFI Family Services (TFI) explained that she has assumed the role of Senior Vice President of Permanency and provided an update on TFI’s activities since the October 4,

2023, Committee meeting. The representative noted TFI is meeting benchmarks for permanency for those children who have been in care for 24 months or longer, but not for those in care between 12 and 24 months, and noted the organization has improved placement stability for children in its care.

June 26 Meeting

Child Welfare System Presentations from Individuals, Organizations, and Providers

Testimony was presented by five private citizens:

- A father expressed frustration with the way DCF and the court treated him during multiple child abuse investigations that turned out to be unsubstantiated during a custody dispute with his ex-wife;
- An individual expressed the need for accountability, systemic changes, and a focus on family and religious values when evaluating the Kansas child welfare system;
- A grandmother of a child involved in the child welfare system expressed her frustration with the perceived lack of response from the Committee after presenting testimony in previous meetings;
- The mother of an individual who passed away while involved with the child welfare system explained her belief that people do not trust DCF because the agency does not take accountability for its actions; and
- The sister of the individual described above expressed frustration that there has been little follow-through by SFM or DCF with respect to the system changes she has suggested.

A representative of Variety KC provided an overview of the organization, stating it provides therapies and devices for physically disabled

children in the Kansas City metropolitan area exclusively through private donations.

KDCA Update

The Child Advocate provided the KDCA's first-quarter update of 2024, which included investigation outcomes, complaint investigation activities, and top concerns reported. The Child Advocate stated the KDCA was working to make its website more user-friendly and improve its case management system. The Child Advocate also noted that pursuant to 2024 SB 115, KDCA will become the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) on July 1 and she will become Acting Child Advocate until the Child Advocate is appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. [Note: The provisions of 2024 SB 115 are codified at KSA 2024 Supp. 75-7601.]

Kansas Judicial Branch Child Welfare Summit Takeaways

A Kansas Supreme Court Justice provided a summary of the 2024 Child Welfare Summit hosted by the Kansas Judicial Branch on April 15–16, 2024, noting key items discussed by child welfare system stakeholders, including:

- Ways to improve collaboration among child welfare professionals;
- Ways to improve communication and to set clear expectations of families and child welfare professionals;
- Recognition of other systemic issues that contribute to challenges experienced by all stakeholders; and

The statutory presumption that children belong with their families, which places the burden on the State to prove removal is necessary.

Achieving Better Outcomes for Children in Need of Care Through the Judicial Process

A representative of Casey Family Programs spoke about the court's role in the child welfare system, effective legal representation for parents and children in child in need of care (CINC) proceedings, and areas of the Revised Kansas Code for Care of Children (CINC Code) that may

need to be clarified to improve outcomes for Kansas children and families.

Case Management and Family Preservation Provider Updates

A representative of Cornerstones of Care reviewed the history of the organization and services offered in Kansas, noting it has recently made contract enhancements by adding addiction counselors and family therapists to its staff.

A representative of DCCCA reviewed the scope of its services and described updates to the foster care licensing regulations affecting foster parents, post-adoption services, the We Kan Drive program for foster youth, and the organization's staffing concerns.

A representative of EHC stated the organization had been busy preparing to replace SFM as the CMP for Sedgwick County and expected to be fully staffed by July 1, 2024, when the contract commences.

A representative of KVC stated the organization is having success reducing foster care entries due to prevention services and noted the organization had reduced the number of youth staying in offices overnight since the previous Committee meeting. The representative also noted that it was developing therapeutic foster homes for high-need foster youth.

A representative of SFM stated the organization continued to recruit employees and noted its staff will decrease with the transition to EHC in Sedgwick County. It is anticipated that following the transition, 62 percent of current SFM employees will become EHC employees in this catchment area.

A representative of TFI stated the organization is partnering with universities across the state to get more of its staff licensed and noted the organization is improving placement stability and reducing the number of children sleeping in offices.

DCF Update

The Secretary presented statistics on the number of children in foster care in the state,

noting the number continues to decline each year. The Secretary noted the agency is implementing changes to relative and non-related kinship licensing regulations, including increasing daily reimbursement rates for these types of foster homes, effective July 1, 2024. The Secretary also noted the agency was working with the Chief Justice to launch a pilot program for family treatment courts aimed at addressing substance abuse issues of parents while keeping families together.

September 11 Meeting

OCA Update

The Acting Child Advocate provided an update on investigation outcomes and activities of the OCA, noting there were 40 complaints in the second quarter, with most complaints related to inadequate contact between parents and children and lack of communication between families and case managers. The Acting Child Advocate also stated the OCA has launched a new website that is more user-friendly across all types of devices.

SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option Update

A representative of FosterAdopt Connect (FAC) provided an update on the work being done by FAC in partnership with DCF with respect to the implementation of the SOUL Family Legal Permanency (SFLP) option.

Two representatives of the SFLP Authentic Youth and Family Engagement Practice Subgroup provided a summary of the work being done by the group, including making recommendations on best practices pertaining to youth and family engagement and training for stakeholders.

What the Research Tells Us About Well-functioning Child Protection Systems

A representative of Casey Family Programs provided information on the various interventions that can be undertaken by states to prevent the out-of-home placement of children. The representative stated the primary drivers of out-of-home placement are parental substance abuse, domestic violence, and untreated mental illness. He suggested states should leverage federal funds to provide mental health and substance abuse treatment and other family support. The representative also suggested states can improve

child welfare outcomes if they implement child poverty reduction programs.

Child Welfare System Presentations from Individuals, Organizations, and Providers

The State Director of the Kansas Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association provided a brief overview of the state's network of 20 local CASA programs that recruit, train, and supervise volunteers who serve as advocates for 1,100 children in the Kansas child welfare system. The State Director noted that from January 1 through June 30, 2024, CASA volunteers made 26,000 advocacy contacts with children in the state.

A representative of Pyxis, a day services provider in Sedgwick County, provided information on the organization's operations and requested the Committee's support in its efforts to expand the hours it is allowed to serve youth by becoming a licensed residential facility to provide overnight accommodations to youth it serves. Currently, the youth that are in the organization's care during the day must move to an emergency shelter at night and then come back to their centers in the morning.

A private citizen discussed the loss of her son and the challenges she faced while trying to access services for him through SFM. She also expressed the need for more respite care for foster families.

Written-only testimony was also submitted by a private citizen.

DCF Update

The Secretary provided statistics related to Kansas youth in care at the end of the state fiscal year (FY) 2024, noting that the state has seen a reduction in child removal rates since 2023. The Secretary stated she believes this reduction can be attributed to the work the agency has done to encourage DCF staff and law enforcement to ask the "four questions" prior to a removal:

- What can we do to remove the danger instead of the child;
- Can someone the child or family knows move into the home to remove the danger;

- Can the caregiver and the child go live with a relative or family friend; and
- Could the child move temporarily to live with a relative or family friend.

The Secretary also noted the agency has worked to increase community engagement when a child is at risk for removal due to factors of poverty rather than neglect.

The Secretary also provided an update on the implementation of family treatment courts and work being done to address the findings of The Center for States Leading for Results study on the causes of placement instability. The Secretary also provided an overview of the statewide rate structure used by child placing agencies (CPAs) for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Presentation on Therapeutic Foster Care

The Deputy Secretary for Children and Families provided an overview of therapeutic family foster homes (TFFHs), which provide safety, permanency, and stability in a family-like setting for children with high acuity needs. She noted the agency has been building TFFH capacity in the state through grants awarded to seven CPAs. She explained the daily payment rate structure for TFFHs, which includes a share paid to the foster home and a share paid to the CPA for administrative costs.

Representatives of these CPAs provided information to the Committee on the services and programs offered through these grants:

- Cornerstones of Care provides therapeutic care services in 11 counties in Northeast Kansas, serving 19 families since March 2024;
- DCCCA provides intensive therapeutic support for both children in foster care and those who are not as a prevention service, and short-term respite care for foster families;
- Eckerd Connects has implemented a foster family mentoring program and weekly

support groups, and it covers expenses for foster families that would not otherwise be covered by the foster care stipend;

- Emberhope Youthville has one licensed TFFH and is working with seven more families to get licensed, and it provides training to build therapeutic relationships within these families;
- FAC offers the Behavioral Interventionist Program in the Kansas City area and is working to expand this program to additional regions of the state;
- KVC currently sponsors eight TFFHs across Kansas, and the organization is working to implement “hub homes” in two locations composed of one licensed foster home, two respite beds, and other resources that can support four, five, or six connected families; and
- Pressley Ridge is developing training curriculum for pre-service and kinship care coaching for child welfare professionals, which was scheduled to roll out in the summer of 2025.

Family Preservation and Case Management Provider Updates

A representative of Cornerstones of Care explained the history and scope of services provided by the organization in Kansas. He stated the organization had 495 foster care clients. The representative explained that because Kansas and Missouri have a border agreement for children in need of placement, Kansas foster children are sometimes temporarily housed in facilities located in Missouri. The representative also noted that the organization has identified 15 youth who would be eligible to choose the SFLP option, with 3 youth currently pursuing this option.

A representative of DCCCA noted several services and programs being operated by the organization, including substance abuse treatment for whole families, with day care provided on site. She also noted its We Kan Drive program, which began in 2021, has helped 730 foster youth learn to drive and obtain driver’s licenses. The

representative described the recent expansion of mental health services that may be covered under Medicaid as an exciting opportunity for the organization to provide more access to mental health services for foster youth.

A representative of EHC summarized the outcomes of the organization's first 2 months of its foster care contract: 25 adoptions had been finalized, 85 referrals had been received, and 26 youth who were formerly night-to-night placements were in long-term placements. The representative also provided information about the organization's Rapid Response Team working to track down runaway youth and the Crossover Youth Practice Model working with justice-involved youth.

A representative of KVC noted the organization's staff retention rate is 75 percent, higher than the national average of 50 percent to 60 percent, but stated the organization is continually working to increase staff engagement and retention through various measures. She stated KVC has been working to reduce overnight stays in the office for youth who are there because of significant behavioral needs that a foster home or facility cannot manage safely. She encouraged the Committee to view a video KVC produced illustrating how and why foster youth sometimes sleep in CMP offices.

A representative of SFM stated the organization was then serving 1,364 youth in out-of-home placement, but that 99.3 percent of children at risk for removal in SFM's catchment area remain in the home after participating in SFM's Family Centered Therapy. He also noted that while 55 youth spent 116 nights in the office over the past fiscal year, the organization had no youth sleeping in offices in July or August.

A representative of TFI explained the organization's range of prevention services, including Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, and noted TFI then sponsored 443 licensed foster families serving 536 youth. The representative stated TFI had a 27 percent reduction of youth in out-of-home placement since 2019, and in FY 2024, the organization had only two cases in which there was a failure to place. The representative noted the organization has identified

seven cases that may benefit from the SFLP option.

Legal Representation for Children in the Child Welfare System

A representative of the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) provided examples of best practices for legal representation of children in need of care, and stated both NACC and the American Bar Association recommend client-directed legal representation for children rather than "best-interest" advocacy, which is the model that Kansas uses.

An attorney and guardian *ad litem* who practices in the 18th Judicial District proposed that Kansas create a centralized office for parent and child legal representation, stating many jurisdictions are moving to this type of "multidisciplinary" model for providing effective representation of parties involved in CINC proceedings.

Supreme Court Permanency Planning Task Force

A representative of the Supreme Court Permanency Planning Task Force (Task Force) provided an overview of the Task Force's recent projects, including the development of best practices in CINC proceedings training for attorneys and judges; the implementation of family treatment court pilot programs; and revisions to the CASA and citizen review board (CRB) programs. The representative also noted future projects of the Task Force include attorney training on the "reasonable efforts" standard in CINC proceedings, webinars for CASA and CRB programs, and translation of CINC forms for non-English speakers.

November 13-14 Meeting

Presentation on McIntyre v. Howard Settlement Agreement Period 3 Progress Report

A representative of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, who is the named neutral party (neutral) in the *McIntyre v. Howard* Settlement Agreement (settlement), provided context for the litigation, an overview of the settlement, a review of progress made in Period 3 of the settlement, and recommendations to DCF and the CMPs based on the neutral's findings in this period.

A representative of Kansas Appleseed, counsel for plaintiffs in the *McIntyre* litigation, responded to the findings of the Period 3 Progress Report (report), stating the report highlights a need for accurate data and data sharing among the CMPs and continued concerns related to placement stability, child welfare workforce, and access to mental health services for foster youth. The representative suggested the need to examine the effectiveness of child welfare privatization in light of the report's findings.

The Secretary highlighted successes within the report, including the improvements made with respect to prevention, which has reduced the number of youth in custody in the state, increased relative placements, and increased the number of stable placements and crisis supports. The Secretary acknowledged the agency fell short of the settlement goals in some areas and outlined DCF's plans to improve performance in these areas.

Presentation on Strategies for Safely Narrowing the Door to Child Welfare Systems

A representative of Casey Family Programs offered her perspective of a well-functioning child protection system, stating the goal is to achieve a balance of safety, potential risk, and due process rights of parents and caregivers. The representative also provided an overview of changes made to the child welfare system in Texas, including changing the statutory definition of neglect and moving to a community-based care model.

DCF Update

The Secretary provided updated figures for the number of children in foster care, and noted this number has consistently decreased since she began her tenure as Secretary in January 2019. The Secretary stated DCF intends to take advantage of Title IV-E federal funding for legal representation of children in need of care and for the implementation of the SFLP option. The Secretary also presented DCF's agenda for the 2025 Legislative Session, which includes:

- Reducing the number of days a child in the care of the Secretary can be authorized for court-ordered secure care placements from 60 days to 45 days;

- Reducing the number of months within which the courts must hold a permanency hearing; and
- Changing the statutory definition of neglect to prevent removal of a child from the family solely due to poverty.

Office of the Child Advocate Update

The Acting Child Advocate provided information regarding complaint investigation activities of the OCA. Since the start of calendar year 2024, 204 complaints involving 321 children have been received, 51 cases were opened for formal investigation, and 158 cases achieved a resolution. She noted the complaints pertained to agency conduct, child safety, permanency, and family separation.

Presentation on Challenges of Law Enforcement Related to Child Welfare Intakes

A representative of the Kansas Association of Chiefs of Police, Kansas Peace Officers Association, and Kansas Sheriffs Association discussed the challenges that law enforcement face when taking children into police protective custody (PPC). He stated one particularly challenging aspect is that DCF staff who have specialized training in this area are available only a small percentage of the time PPC is initiated. The representative offered suggestions to improve law enforcement's ability to assess and respond to calls concerning child safety, including the use of a risk assessment tool designed specifically for use by law enforcement in making a determination whether PPC should be initiated. He also suggested making it easier for law enforcement to contact DCF staff during non-business hours.

Presentation on Children With Special Needs in Foster Care

A representative of Sunflower Health Plan, speaking on behalf of all managed care organizations (MCOs) doing business in Kansas, presented on the MCOs' role in providing health care services for foster youth with special health needs. She explained that the CMP determines the level of care needed and the CPA determines its own pay structure depending on the types of foster homes and services it provides. The representative

noted most CPAs utilize the Intellectual/Developmental Disability Waiver tiered payment system.

Presentation on Court Appointed Special Advocates

A representative of the Kansas CASA Association reviewed the history of the organization and provided information on the current activities of local CASA programs across Kansas. She stated CASA had served approximately 1,000 children per quarter this calendar year and contributed to 330 case closures in the first three quarters.

Child Abuse Review Examinations Network Update

A representative of the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics provided an update on operations of the Child Abuse Review Examinations (CARE) Network Program, authorized by legislation enacted in 2023. The representative stated 4,137 referrals were made to the program in the period from April 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024, and a medical examination was recommended in 361 cases. The representative noted the program to date has provided training to 74 providers in 27 counties.

Child Welfare System Presentations from Individuals, Organizations, and Providers

A representative of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth expressed appreciation for the leadership of the Committee and to the members who will not be returning to the Legislature in 2025.

A private citizen whose son passed away while receiving services from SFM shared memories of her son with the Committee and asked that the State be more responsive to children with special needs that end up in the child welfare system.

A private citizen shared ideas for strengthening families in Kansas to reduce entry into the foster care system.

A private citizen shared her experience attempting to obtain services for her daughter who had been struggling with self-harm and multiple suicide attempts, which resulted in her placement

in state custody in 2023. The citizen stated she has not been able to see her daughter since the daughter entered state custody and has also encountered difficulty with the state recognizing the order of custody granted in Missouri with respect to her other children.

Family Preservation and Case Management Provider Updates

A representative of Cornerstones of Care stated nearly all of the families served through its family preservation programming have been able to avoid entering the foster care system, but noted the organization continues to struggle to find stable placements in all cases. The representative suggested marketing professionals use data to target potential interested persons for recruitment of foster families.

A representative of DCCCA provided its most recent service statistics and noted it is working toward becoming a “hope-centered workplace,” a new initiative that will provide training to DCCCA staff on the science of hope. The representative stated DCCCA will begin Hope Navigator training in January 2025.

A representative of EHC reported on the organization’s recent figures and noted challenges within EHC include a lack of sufficient records for foster youth, night-to-night placements, and youth refusing to go to school or therapy or to take prescribed medications. The representative noted EHC had 109 instances of failure to place involving 31 youth since July 1. She also noted the organization continued to have workforce issues, noting a difficulty in finding applicants who are licensed in social welfare.

A representative of KVC presented a chart illustrating the organization’s compliance with the *McIntyre* settlement goals. She noted the workforce retention rate within the organization is currently 75 percent.

A representative of SFM provided an update of the organization’s range of services. The representative noted SFM employs two staff members whose only job is to locate missing youth and bring them back to care.

A representative of TFI provided statistics on children and families served in its catchment area. She highlighted three areas in which TFI hopes to improve in the coming months: workforce, prevention, and services for high-needs youth. The representative noted TFI continues to partner with social welfare programs at Kansas universities for staff recruitment, and expressed concerns that some universities have discouraged students from pursuing careers in child welfare in the recent past.

Presentation on Environmental Study of Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility Youth Admissions

A representative of KDADS presented an overview of the environmental study of the psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) system in Kansas that was authorized by a budget proviso enacted during the 2024 Legislative Session. The study was authorized to identify opportunities for KDADS to facilitate improved clinically appropriate treatment for youth, including those who are in the custody of the State. The representative noted the current PRTF system does not have the capacity to treat the number of youth who need this level of care, stating as of June 1, 2024, 136 youth remained on the waitlist for a PRTF.

State Child Death Review Board Annual Report

The Executive Director of the State Child Death Review Board (Board) reviewed the most recent annual report, containing 2022 data. Of 389 child fatalities in 2022, 227 were natural deaths, 74 were unintentional deaths, 22 were homicides, 21 were suicides, and 45 deaths were of undetermined causes. The Executive Director noted the overall rate of child deaths had declined over the previous year, but drug-related deaths due to fentanyl increased significantly from 2019 to 2022. She also noted firearm-related deaths decreased from 44 in 2021 to 30 in 2022. The Executive Director also presented the Board's legislative priorities for the 2025 Session:

- Ensure compliance with KSA 38-2226, specifically with respect to the sections known as Adrian's Law;
- Enforce child care licensing; and
- Enhance coroner training.

Review of Neglect Definitions and Proposed Changes

The Deputy Secretary for Children and Families reviewed the current statutory definition of neglect in the Kansas Statutes Annotated and noted the need to distinguish poverty, economic insecurity, or hardship from actual neglect. The Deputy Secretary presented model language from seven other state laws pertaining to neglect definitions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to the following recommendations:

- CMPs should report at each Committee meeting on how many positions in their organizations are filled at that time by unlicensed individuals;
- School districts, CMPs, and DCF should take a multi-pronged approach in notifying foster youth of any financial or educational benefits that may be available to them after reaching the age of 18 or graduating;
- Literacy assessments should be required for every child adjudicated to be in need of care;
- Bench cards used by judges and attorneys practicing in CINC cases should include questions verifying that the guardian *ad litem* assigned in the case has met with the child;
- When a foster youth has a change in placement that requires enrollment in a new school, CMPs need to ensure such enrollment is timely;
- Law enforcement officers should provide written information to parents regarding what is to be expected in the 72 hours following a PPC removal;

- Legislation providing additional resources to law enforcement with respect to PPC removals should be supported;
- The Committee should develop a list of questions standardizing the minimum quarterly reporting requirements for family preservation and CMP grantees;
- Legislative staff should inform the family of A.J. Iverson of the process for filing a claim against the State with the Joint Committee on Special Claims Against the State;
- The House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care or successor committee should hold informational hearings on the following topics: 1) legislative reforms pertaining to the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect 2) consideration of legislation granting *Miranda* rights for parents involved with the child welfare system; and 3) whether out-of-state child custody orders are being honored by Kansas courts;
- Kinship care placements should be made as early as possible and legislation considering a child's attachment to kinship caregivers when granting adoptions should be supported;
- DCF should shorten the timelines by which foster youth must receive mental health treatment, and the Committee should consider possible enforcement mechanisms to accomplish this goal;
- DCF should ask contractors to record details pertaining to youth who miss mental health treatment appointments at certified community behavioral health clinics, including the reason for the missed appointment and how frequently appointments are being missed, and compile this data for reporting to the Committee;
- Kansas universities with social welfare programs should present information to the Committee regarding their individual efforts to encourage students to pursue careers in child welfare;
- The State Child Death Review Board should provide education to the general public on safe firearm storage;
- The House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care or successor committee should prioritize the consideration of legislation amending the definition of "neglect" in the CINC Code;
- The House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care or successor committee should consider DCF's legislative priorities as presented to the Committee at its November 2024 meeting.