

Testimony on SB367 to  
The Senate Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of Senate Bill 367. I would like to highlight four specific areas of this proposed bill that I believe will have significant impact on the youth and families of Kansas.

One area of particular interest and excitement is the knowledge that these proposed changes are inclusive and understanding of the stages of adolescent development, more so than we have ever been. We have been very thorough in addressing a juvenile's anti-social and criminal behavior, but have not consistently viewed those behaviors through the lens of adolescent development. Behaviors, especially those of a teenager, cannot be understood or explained, much less rehabilitated or changed, when not viewed through this lens of cognitive, emotional and neurological development. By ensuring all layers of our system are armed with this information, we can not only accomplish our mission of public safety, but can also more effectively support juveniles with their transition into healthy adulthood.

For a long time, the systems in Kansas serving juvenile offenders have operated in a very compartmentalized fashion, each operating separately from each other and often in opposing directions. SB 367 describes the framework and structure of a more holistic approach to serving kids and families. It brings families, corrections professionals, educators, law enforcement, court personnel, social services, and many others, together to the same table with the understanding that rehabilitating juvenile offenders is not the responsibility of one, but the responsibility of all. We are all responsible for behavior change. We are all, together, responsible for raising healthy children and teenagers.

Some of the most meaningful recommendations in this bill, from the perspective of the juvenile correctional facilities, include diverting misdemeanor and low risk offenders away from the correctional facilities, as well as requiring more interventions in the community prior to revoking a juvenile's supervision. Research on effective correctional practices is consistently showing us that mixing low risk youth with moderate or high risk youth (as is currently done in the facilities), at best, produces no change in behavior for the low risk youth. At worst, we increase the risk level of low risk youth. While our population in the facilities has decreased over the past year, we now find ourselves working with juveniles who have more severe needs, requiring more staff resources and more targeted treatment and programming. Redirecting misdemeanor offenders, as well as low risk offenders, away from the facilities allows them to remain in their community, where research consistently shows they are best served, allowing juvenile correctional facility staff to reinvest those resources with high risk and high need youth.

I have worked in corrections, in some way or another, for about sixteen years. I am fortunate to also be serving my community as a member of my local school board. As someone who experiences both the juvenile justice system and the education system, I appreciate the recommendations that focus on the important role that educators play in the lives of juveniles. In the pages of this bill, I see a plan to further equip educators, school personnel and communities with the tools necessary to address troublesome behaviors without ushering more youth into the

juvenile justice system, especially because it is often difficult for them to then exit the system. For most kids, education is their way out of poverty and/or crime; therefore, it is critical that we maintain this focus of ensuring kids receive a true, quality education.

Thank you for this opportunity to advocate for the juvenile justice system and in favor of SB 367.