

House Child Welfare and Foster Care Committee
February 15, 2023
Sister Therese Bangert
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Proponent of HB2361

Thank YOU for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

The children that are in the Kansas Child Welfare System
Hold a special place in my heart.

They claimed that place back in 1973

when I went to work at St. Vincent Home here in Topeka.

For three years I was a teacher there.

For six years I was a Child Care worker.

This experience was my beginning teacher about the children
who for multiple reasons were not able to be in the care
of their parents.

From these children I gained a son –

I am his Mom – it is not an honorary title – we walk the walk!

He was the first one to teach me

what it was like to belong to no one. He is now 50 years old.

I watch him deal almost daily with the wounds of his childhood trauma.

He is an accomplished fine-dining waiter – compassionate and honest -

But his childhood still exacts a toll from him.

I also served as a CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocate.

This was another learning experience as I went to Court

With children . . .

This Bill, from my understanding, gives DCF a clear legal reason
to allow a foster family to adopt a child if that child
has been with them for over a year.

I am still haunted by the story of the 3-year-old in Wyandotte County
who was recently removed from the only family she knew -
the only family who had cared for her.

She was taken to live with siblings with whom she had interacted
for 10 hours.

Her cries (as reported) as she was taken away

“I WANT TO GO HOME” ring in my heart.

She knew what was happening.

She also knew where HOME was.

(I need to add here that I am grateful that DCF

is appealing the Judge’s decision in this case.

And my knowledge of the case is only from KC STAR reporting)

I believe we have learned more about childhood trauma

Since the 70’s when I worked at St. Vincent’s.

I am not sure those learnings have permeated the systems.

I do know this 3-year-old has been traumatized.

And I believe the brother with whom she shared HOME

has also been traumatized.

I would like to believe that HB2361 can help prevent

another child from being so traumatized.

I want to conclude my testimony today

with a story told by Dr. Karl Menninger.

He was a pioneer in the treatment of mental health.

Dr. Karl’s name is in one of those Kansas frames

on the sidewalk here on the Capitol grounds.

Thank YOU for hearing me today.

Thank YOU for being willing to serve on this Committee.

Foster Care stories are not for the faint of heart

But from my eyes you are doing the most important work

in the Legislative Body. YOU have my prayers.