



CENTER FOR THE RIGHTS
OF ABUSED CHILDREN

Support HB 2536:

SOUL Family Legal Permanency Option

In-Person Testimony

John Monroe, Catalyst

on behalf of the

Center for the Rights of Abused Children

House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care

January 24, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

Introduction

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Ousley, and members of the committee:

My name is John Monroe, and I represent the Center for the Rights of Abused Children. We support HB 2536

The Center was founded several years ago to ensure every child has a safe and loving home. Children and youth in foster care should not languish in the system year after year. Whether by safe reunification, adoption, or guardianship, children have a right to family, permanency, and stability. Policymakers should strive for a system that helps children find permanency quickly.

HB 2536 provides another path to help youth obtain permanency, and it merits the legislature's support.

Argument

Nationally, more than [19,000](#) children exited foster care into adulthood without finding a permanent home. While many of these teens are legally free for adoption, only [4%](#) of children age 16 and older will be adopted. In 2023, 455 Kansas children exited care without a family.

The outcomes for teens who age out of the child welfare system are dismal.

- [29%](#) of young adults who age out of foster care report being homeless from ages 19 to 21;



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- [One in five](#) between the ages of 19 and 21 are incarcerated;
- And [43%](#) are unemployed at age 21.

The Center firmly believes we can change these outcomes. We envision a day when every child has a family. We must end the tragedy of “aging out” of the foster care system.

As part of our effort to improve child welfare systems throughout the country, we have monitored the SOUL Family project with great interest. Adding a permanency option for youth who may not fit into our current definition of permanency -- reunification, adoption, or guardianship --- gives youth an opportunity to have supportive, lifelong relationships.

Kansas has led the country in piloting the SOUL Family project. We are excited for the potential to ensure all youth have an opportunity to form lasting relationships and support systems that can help them thrive on their path to adulthood.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to support HB 2536.