

## TESTIMONY OF ELLEN RYAN SENATE BILL 262

My name is Ellen Ryan and I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 262, an act relating to grandparent custody, visitation and residency. First of all I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

I come before the committee this afternoon as a resident of Johnson County Kansas, a grandmother, a retired Kansas family law attorney and recent “survivor” of a grandparent visitation case.

My particular case arose under K.S.A. 38-129, while Mr. Turner’s case arose out of a “Child in Need of Care” proceeding.

The common thread of grandparent cases is about the constant worry about vulnerable children who do not have a voice of their own. These cases are unconscionably expensive both emotionally and financially. These cases use tremendous court resources at a time when our family court judges have almost impossibly large caseloads.

State resources for children are strained by budgetary constraints.

The State is not a substitute for family support when it comes to taking care of children. Senate Bill 262, is a step in the direction of bolstering a public policy of recognizing families provide better support for children than a State agency.

Grandparents have historically operated within family units as a “safety net” for at risk children. These children may be at risk due a variety of reasons such as death of a parent, parental psychiatric impairment, parental alcohol or substance abuse, domestic violence or a combination of some or all of the above.

The number of grandchildren living with a grandparent has dramatically increased in the past decades. In 1970, approximately 2.2 million children lived with grandparents in the U.S. According to the 2010 U.S. Census report, 7.5 million children now live with a grandparent, more than one-fifth did not have a parent living in the home. This represents a dramatic increase of the number of children living with grandparents over the past decades.

Common sense should tell us our laws should recognize this new reality and encourage the role of grandparents. It is not in the interests of children or the State to minimize or dismiss grandparents as an important resource for at risk children. These children need every possible resource that we can provide for them.

When grandparents are available to fill a role in this safety net they can provide support that extends long beyond the involvement of the state, and we must facilitate their involvement in these difficult cases.

I thank you for your time this afternoon. I would be more than happy to try to answer any questions that you may have for me. If not, I would urge the members of this committee to give your support to Senate Bill 262.