



*Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas*

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## Legislative Budget Committee

November 14, 2014

*Testimony on:*

# **Overview of child abuse and runaway youth investigations**

Presented by:

Gina Meier-Hummel

Secretary

Kansas Department for Children and Families

Steven Greene II, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs

DCF Administration Building, 555 S. Kansas Ave.

785-291-3629

**Testimony of:**

Gina Meier-Hummel, Secretary  
Kansas Department for Children and Families

**Testimony on:**

Overview of child abuse investigations and missing and runaway youth

**Chairman McGinn, Vice-Chair Waymaster and Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). DCF oversees the Kansas Protection Report Center (KPRC). Any individual who suspects abuse or neglect can call the KPRC to make a report. In FY 18, the KPRC received 91,087 reports of abuse and neglect of adults and children. Of those reports, 72,683 regarded suspected child abuse or neglect. Once the report is screened at the KPRC, it is then sent to the corresponding DCF Region for the field staff to investigate. Of those 72,683 reports, only 62 percent of the reports were assigned in FY 18 because they reached the threshold of abuse or neglect, per Kansas statute and policies. After assignment, DCF staff and/or law enforcement will gather information to make a decision about whether the allegation(s) of abuse or neglect has happened or is in danger of happening. At the result of an investigation, there will be a case finding that is one of three options—unsubstantiated, affirmed or substantiated.

- An “unsubstantiated” finding means a reasonable person weighing the facts or circumstances would decide it is more likely than not (preponderance of the evidence) the alleged perpetrator’s actions or inactions do not meet the abuse and/or neglect definitions, per Kansas statute.
- An “affirmed” finding means a reasonable person weighing the facts and circumstances would decide it is more likely than not (preponderance of the evidence) the alleged perpetrator’s actions or inactions meet the abuse/neglect definition, per Kansas statute.
- A “substantiated” finding means a reasonable person weighing the facts and circumstances would decide it is more likely than not (preponderance of the evidence) the alleged perpetrator’s actions or inactions meet the abuse/neglect definition per Kansas Statutes Annotated (K.S.A.) and Kansas Administrative Regulations (K.A.R.), and meet criteria indicating the alleged perpetrator should not be permitted to reside, work, or regularly volunteer in a child care facility regulated by KDHE or DCF Foster Care and Residential Facility Licensing.

If the evidence supports a substantiated finding, the person identified as responsible for the abuse or neglect will have his/her name placed on a statewide list of substantiated perpetrators known as the Kansas Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry.

Below is the amount the agency spends on investigating child and abuse investigations across the state of Kansas:

Program Code Description	Quarter ending 9/30/2017	Quarter ending 12/31/2017	Quarter ending 3/31/2018	Quarter ending 6/30/2018	SFY Total
KPRC	829,633	1,100,343	1,028,014	1,213,099	4,171,090
West field staff	1,591,164	1,771,886	1,515,095	1,688,163	6,566,308
Kansas City field staff	1,185,395	1,390,783	1,220,278	1,379,518	5,175,973
East field staff	1,313,076	1,495,422	1,273,653	1,476,010	5,558,161
Wichita field staff	1,327,926	1,564,744	1,245,460	1,393,829	5,531,958
Total Direct Costs	6,247,194	7,323,177	6,282,499	7,150,620	27,003,490

### Update on Missing and Runaway Youth

For the past 10 months, the agency has focused on locating missing and runaway youth. Currently, DCF has an investigative unit with two full-time staff, a public service administrator and a special investigator, each with a yearly salary of \$40,000. On a daily basis, these individuals work with local law enforcement, contract staff and other community partners to locate and ensure the safety of youth who have run away from their foster care placement. While the investigative team looks for youth on a daily basis, the agency has also launched targeted sweeps in which large groups of DCF staff, contract staff, DCF's Anti-Human Trafficking Coordinator and local law enforcement spend an entire day aggressively looking for youth. During the sweep in Kansas City, the agency was able to locate four youth. During the sweep in Wichita, the agency was able to locate four youth.

DCF has also recently partnered with the Youth Advocate Program (YAP). YAP comes alongside case managers to be advocates for children. Once in care and picked up from runaway status, youth are assigned an advocate through the YAP program that sticks with them regardless of where they go in the state or where they are placed. It is a trust-based relationship between the advocate and youth. The advocate will help identify why the youth is running, and we hope help prevent them from running in the future. With this partnership, we are giving youth that run away from placement a level of safety, security and support to establish meaningful relationships with their YAP advocate. It is our intent to strengthen our relationship with law enforcement and other partners to help at-risk youth.

Due to recent agency initiatives, DCF has seen a decrease in the number of runaway youth. On August 31, 2017, there were 86 missing or runaway youth. Comparatively, on August 31, 2018, there were 63, representing a 26.7 percent decrease in the number of

missing and runaway youth. While the number of youth who have run away from placement continues to fluctuate daily, DCF has consistently seen lower numbers. As of yesterday, there were 76 verified runaways, 1 unserved exparte and one relative abduction. DCF will continue to actively look for these youth because even one child missing from placement is one too many. Kansas is one of the only, if not the only, state actively looking for runaway youth. These at-risk youth will continue to be a priority for the agency.

During the 2018 Legislative Session, the legislature approved \$150,000 in FY 19 to help the agency locate and ensure the safety of missing and runaway youth. As of Oct. 2018, DCF has utilized approximately \$30,530, in one quarter. DCF increased the budget for FY 2019 by approximately \$40,000 to fund a second position. This increase was absorbed with existing budget funds.

Below is the year to date costs associated with actively locating missing and runaway youth:

Investigation of Missing Youth YTD Expenses Through Oct. 2018	
Cell phones	353
Salaries	30,056
Supplies	28
Travel	94
Grant total	30,530

In addition to the direct costs above, the sweeps also cost approximately \$6,000 for salaries, and \$500 for travel.

DCF remains committed to serving the children and families of Kansas with professionalism and compassion. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.