

Kristen Powell, Progeny Youth Leader - Testimony on HB 2200

HB 2200 has proposed changes that are harmful to young people who come in contact with our juvenile justice system.

Allowing for judges to have more discretion in juvenile offender cases and allowing for case length limit extensions will set us back from the progress that we as a state made when we passed SB 367.

Since SB 367 passed there have been calls to action by communities who are most impacted by the juvenile justice system to open up access to the reinvestment funds, because there is a clear lack of investment in these communities and the youth from these communities are continuing to be overrepresented in our state's juvenile justice system.

Both continuing to invest in state and institutionalized programs and allowing for judges to sentence youth to longer amounts of time in jail and prison will push us back and increase the amount of harm that is caused to young people.

Our state is in a public health crisis with our young people because of the lack of programs and alternatives that we currently have, and we are allowing for detrimental consequences to continue to happen as we cycle these youth through one system to another.

To paint a better picture of the crisis that the youth in the state of Kansas are in, I want to draw everyone's attention to what is happening with the numbers for the Motion for Adult Prosecution (MAP) hearings in Sedgwick County alone. In 2020 there were a total of 8 MAP hearings that were transferred to the adult court system. By the end of 2021 there were a total of 43 cases that were filed by the DA's office for young people to be charged as adults.

This is alarming and our state should be asking questions when we have this dramatic of an increase of young people who are being sent over to the adult system.

SB 367 was meant to be a bill that could be built upon in hopes that future reform efforts would continue, and we could reduce the amount of harm that we are causing to youth and their families. Our state needs to move away from the harmful and punitive practices that are allowed to be used on our children.

We cannot continue to use fear and punishment to drive our decisions on what happens to our youth. We have judges who are frustrated because young people continue to cycle in and out of their courtrooms with what seems to be little to no consequences. But consequences do not always have to be the answer.

Research has shown us that almost all youth engage in delinquent behavior at some point in their life. The only line in the sand is the line between who gets caught and who doesn't. Who lives in a community with police presence and who does not.

Research also has shown us that most youth grow out of delinquency, but what about the few who don't? What about the few who are high risk or violent offenders? Do we lock them up and then lock them up longer when they don't learn their lesson? Is this really the only solution we have?

A longer sentence in jail is not going to help a child. A jumpsuit, shackles, and corrections officers will not provide opportunity, healing, and rehabilitation for a young person. We have countless amounts of research and evidence that shows us that jail and prison is not the answer that will help our children.

What is the answer? Investment in our children, their families, and their communities. We have young people and organizers who are doing the work and who have done the work to lay out what we need in our communities, and I strongly encourage everyone to read Progeny's Blueprint report as well as the SB 367 Anniversary Report. Both of these reports provide relevant research about these issues, and they are available on Progeny's website, www.progenyks.com.