



Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the contributing factors to the increasing number of children in the child welfare system including, but not limited to, substance abuse, legislation, and policies and procedures to safely reduce the number of children in care.

The data available on the Kansas Department for Children and Families website point to several potential contributing factors for the record numbers of children currently placed in Kansas’s foster care system.

**The availability of intensive in-home services for families at risk of foster care involvement has not kept pace with the increased number of reports of potential child abuse and neglect.**

The number of intake reports of potential child abuse or neglect received by DCF increased considerably between fiscal years 2011 and 2013, and has increased more slowly since. This same pattern can be seen in the number of reports assigned for investigation, and the number of children removed from their homes and placed into foster care. Given these trends, we would expect to see a similar increase in the number of referrals to Family Preservation Services, as intensive in-home supports to prevent removal into foster care would presumably be the appropriate response for a similar proportion of the rising reports and investigations. Instead, referrals to Family Preservation Services remained relatively flat over this period.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change 2011-2017
Intake reports received	59,775	64,129	65,421	65,152	65,631	67,642	67,372	+12.7%
Reports assigned	30,458	33,989	35,863	35,551	36,611	37,807	37,445	+22.9%
Removals	3,408	3,623	3,974	3,805	3,799	3,952	4,020	+18.0%
Family preservation referrals	2,687	2,613	2,476	2,576	2,621	2,610	2,630	-2.1%

*Source: Kansas Appleseed summary of data from the Kansas Department for Children and Families website.*

In other words, it appears that services to prevent removals were not available for all families that would have benefited from them, leaving social workers without the range of options to make the best decision for each family’s need; in these circumstances, more children may be removed “just in case” or “to be safe.”

Going forward, the funding and availability of Family Preservation Services should be flexible enough to expand and contract with the need (similar to foster care services) in order to ensure that there is not a cap—formal or informal—on the number of families that can be served if Family Preservation Services are the right match for their needs.

**A rising number of children are entering foster care for reasons related to neglect at the same time that social safety net services are assisting many fewer children and families.**

As in other states, the largest share of removals in Kansas has historically been related to neglect. However, it is notable that the recent growth in children entering foster care in Kansas has been almost entirely related to neglect; the number of children entering foster care due to physical or sexual abuse has remained relatively steady by comparison. (Child welfare cases—like families—are complex, and commonly involve multiple removal reasons. Because the primary removal reason identified by DCF is related to neglect does not mean that other factors, such as substance abuse, are not involved.)

<i>Primary removal reason:</i>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>% change 2011-2017</b>
Physical abuse	508	555	578	533	608	549	584	<b>+15.0%</b>
Sexual abuse	172	204	171	159	164	186	168	<b>-2.3%</b>
Physical neglect	362	375	499	505	553	667	683	<b>+88.7%</b>
Lack of supervision	262	285	300	330	385	524	631	<b>+140.8%</b>

*Source: Kansas Appleseed summary of data from the Kansas Department for Children and Families website.*

In state fiscal year 2017, an additional 690 children entered foster care for reasons related to physical neglect or lack of supervision compared to state fiscal year 2011.

Over this same period, services that help families provide for their basic needs (including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), as well as child care assistance that could help prevent some cases of lack of supervision, have both assisted many fewer children.

Number of children served by TANF		Number of children served by child care assistance	
July 2010	25,467	July 2010	20,627
July 2017	7,516	July 2017	10,145

*Source: Kansas Appleseed summary of data from the Kansas Department for Children and Families website.*

Research from the University of Kansas has demonstrated a causal connection between more restrictive TANF policies that dramatically reduced the number of families assisted and increasing numbers of children in foster care.

Efforts to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system should go beyond changes to the foster care system itself and address contributing factors, recognizing the degree to which our increased foster care numbers in Kansas are related to cases associated with physical neglect and lack of supervision. Removing barriers and expanding access to TANF and child care assistance should be a part of any child welfare reform plan.

**Local policies and practices interact with statewide trends; jurisdictions where foster care numbers have not gone up should be examined for potential promising practices.**

While there are over 2,000 more children in foster care today compared to six years ago, the increase has not been uniform across the state. Just within Kansas's ten largest counties, the percentage change in the monthly average out of home care population between state fiscal year 2011 and 2017 varies considerably:

	2011	2017	% change 2011-2017
Johnson	450	603	34.0%
Sedgwick	950	952	0.21%
Shawnee	755	689	-8.7%
Wyandotte	431	562	30.4%
Douglas	71	170	139.4%
Leavenworth	61	174	185.3%
Riley	57	54	-5.23%
Butler	124	174	40.3%
Reno	235	248	5.5%
Saline	102	190	86.3%

*Source: Kansas Appleseed summary of data from the Kansas Department for Children and Families website.*

Counties, judicial districts, or contract regions with notable trends should be examined to identify possible explanatory factors. For areas not seeing increases in foster care placements: have these areas not been affected by some of the factors driving increasing numbers elsewhere? Have they found ways of mitigating these factors? Are other factors counteracting them?

As one example, Shawnee County has seen a decrease in the number of children in out of home care between state fiscal years 2011 and 2017. Unlike many counties, Shawnee County had an increased number of Family Preservation referrals over this period. Another possible factor could be the Drug Endangered Child program, funded primarily by the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention grant, which operates in Shawnee County to provide comprehensive support for mothers struggling with substance abuse.

A more rigorous examination of relevant units of analysis (e.g., counties, judicial districts) could identify practices that could help reduce the number of children entering foster care in other areas of the state. The legislature can ensure that there is sufficient internal capacity at DCF to do this work, provide funding for an outside consultant, or both.

Thank you for your interest in this testimony and your service on this Working Group.

Sincerely,

Michael Pahr  
Public Policy Director  
Kansas Appleseed