March 7, 2016

Shannon Cotsonradis, President and CEO
Kansas Action for Children
Testimony for SB 367
House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

Chairman Rubin and Members of the Committee:

Kansas Action for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated
to shaping health, education and economic policy that improves the lives of
Kansas children and families. On behalf of incarcerated Kansas kids now and
in the future, we support the recommended reforms to Kansas’ juvenile
justice system included in SB 367.

Too many Kansas kids are exposed to lengthy stays in youth prison.
The vast majority of Kansas youth in prison are low- or moderate-risk
offenders. On average, Kansas kids are sent to out-of-home placements for 14
months. Sending these youth to out-of-home placements for lengthy periods
of time does not reduce the chances of re-offending. Youth entering the
juvenile justice system need community-based alternatives to out-of-home
placements or incarceration.

Local, family-based alternatives are better for reducing future offenses.
Keeping juvenile offenders in their community is the most successful way to get
these kids back on track. Though incarcerating kids outside of their communities
is not effective it is still often used as a first-resort in our juvenile justice system.
By keeping youth at home, community rehabilitation programs can focus on
problems in a youth’s family and peer groups, while simultaneously
concentrating on the youth’s own behavior and risks. Here in Kansas, we’ve
seen some early success with local alternatives. Wyandotte County adopted an
intensive program known as Multi-Systemic Therapy in 2013 and has been able
to reduce out-of-home placements by one-fourth.

Reforms included in this legislation have been proven to work elsewhere.
Other states have enacted similar reforms and they have proven effective.
Kansas will not be the first to use many of the reforms included in the
legislation; other states adopting similar reforms continue to see reductions in
youth offenses and reinvestment in more effective strategies. Reforms
comparable to those in this legislation have shown to reduce recidivism and re-
offense rates in states from Ohio to Texas. Kansas has the advantage of using
evidence-based and proven models for reforming the juvenile justice system to
get better results, all while making sure the adopted reforms suit the specific
needs of Kansas.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the committee members adopt
the reforms to Kansas’ juvenile justice system as recommended by the Juvenile
Justice Workgroup and included in SB 367.

2 Presentation to Kansas inter-branch Juvenile Justice Workgroup. Pew Charitable Trusts, August 2015.
4 “Kansas Juvenile Justice Trends: Report to Kansas Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile
Justice Oversight.” Kansas Department of Corrections, October 2014.
5 “Re-Examining Juvenile Incarceration: High Cost, Poor Outcomes Spark Shift to Alternatives.”
Pew Charitable Trusts, April 2015.