



Responsible Policy. Real Prosperity.

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Kansas Center for Economic Growth
House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

Chairman Rubin and Members of the Committee:

The Kansas Center for Economic Growth is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that conducts research and analysis to promote balanced state policies that help all Kansans prosper. On behalf of Kansas families and juveniles, we support reforms to Kansas' juvenile justice system as recommended by the Juvenile Justice Workgroup and in SB 367. Doing so would use taxpayer dollars more effectively, achieve better results in the juvenile justice system, and make Kansans safer overall.

Kansas' juvenile justice system ranks 6th worst in the nation for the over-confinement of children. It is in need of change. The system uses taxpayer dollars inefficiently by sending kids to expensive out-of-home confinement that is the least effective way to deal with juvenile offenses. Two-thirds of the juvenile justice budget – about \$53 million a year – is spent on putting juveniles in out-of-home placements, while only a little over 2% of the budget goes to preventing juvenile offenses in the first place. Reforming the system would make more effective use of taxpayer dollars through evidence-based community alternatives. Not only are these strategies more successful, they also are more cost-effective. Programs like Functional Family Therapy returns \$13 for each dollar spent. Making changes to our youth justice system will have long-term benefits to Kansas and for Kansas youth. Using the thoroughly researched and consensus-based recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Work Group would put Kansas' juvenile justice system on a path to:

- **Use taxpayer dollars more effectively.** Keeping youth in the community and investing in evidence-based alternatives costs less and is a more successful way to deal with juvenile offenders in the long-run. Towards this end, KCEG recommends that dollars saved through these reforms be set aside and dedicated to reinvestment in community-based alternatives.
- **Achieve better results.** Evidence-based community alternatives generate a high return-on-investment while curbing youth recidivism. Incarcerating low-risk youth, especially for lengthy stays, increases the risk of recidivism, while the recommendations from the Work Group have been vetted and have been shown to work in other states.
- **Make Kansans safer.** Over 40% of Kansas youth sent to juvenile prisons were incarcerated again within three years of release. Furthermore, reforming the system will likely reduce the populations of Kansas' adult prisons, which are over capacity. Reforming the system will reduce the likelihood of youth re-offending, reducing re-incarceration as juveniles and as adults as well.

Kansas' juvenile justice system is inefficient. These recommendations give Kansas the opportunity to make better use of taxpayer dollars and achieve better results for Kansas youth. We respectfully request that the Committee adopt the recommended reforms within SB 367 in order to more wisely use taxpayer funds, increase the chances for successfully addressing youth offenders, and keep Kansans safer in the long-term.