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Written Testimony in Support of HB 2553
House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care

Chair Concannon, Ranking Member Ousely and Members of the House Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am writing in support of House Bill 2553, establishing procedures for law enforcement agencies and DCF to follow and use when a child in foster care goes missing.

Kansas Appleseed, has a long history of unwavering commitment to advocating for the rights and well-being of children, including improving our state's foster care system. When a child is missing from foster care, they are at risk of harm. It is paramount to find them quickly and then determine why they were missing from care. This is for the immediate and continued safety of the child. HB 2553 establishes a robust process for coordination between DCF and law enforcement when a child in foster care is missing. This bill is a step to helping ensure children in the state's welfare system are in safe, stable placements.

This bill would ensure that not only are children found, but that they are found quickly through coordinated efforts. Children entering foster care may be at risk to run from their placements due to histories of abuse and neglect, substance abuse, mental health diagnoses, and instability of placements. Research has shown that while missing from foster care, children are at higher risk of being sexually or physically victimized, engaging in delinquent behavior, using drugs or alcohol, or being victims of human trafficking.¹ The longer a child is missing from foster care the more likely it is that they will experience harm of some sort. This bill is the groundwork to limit these risks to Kansas children.

As a state, we can take this step to help ensure that the children in the state's custody have every chance of being maintained in a safe environment and found when they are not. Kansas children are falling through the cracks and missing from their placements everyday:

- Kansas has one of the highest rates (7%) of incidents of children missing from foster care.²
- At any given time in the state more than 50 kids are missing from foster care.
- On average 67 kids go missing from foster care each month in Kansas.
- Just under 70% of children missing from foster care in the state are recovered each month.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau. "Responding to Youth Missing from Foster Care." 2020. https://cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3fs-us-east-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/missing_youth.pdf?VersionId=oSs7DjMcjYpwbdrZJKRyKYKYiqr8MGME

² OIG. "National Snapshot of State Agency Approaches to Reporting and Locating Children Missing from Foster Care." 2022. <https://oig.hhs.gov/oas/reports/region7/72006095.pdf>



- Almost half of all children missing from foster care in Kansas are missing for 1-6 months.³

These children missing from foster care deserve to be found safely, understood, and cared for. This bill will provide clear, robust guidance to help ensure that.

Further, this bill provides additional oversight from the Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight of both DCF and law enforcement to ensure compliance with the process and requirements in the bill. This is a crucial element to ensuring the safety of children in foster care and getting them in safe, stable placements. DCF policies indicate they are taking many of the steps to find kids missing from foster care that are outlined in this bill. However, the bill ensures cross-agency coordination is occurring with a legislative oversight mechanism to make sure these policies are put into practice in all cases. No child should be forgotten and all resources should be employed to find every single kid.

One child in the protection of the state going missing is one too many. Yet, Kansas currently has 7% of children missing from its care at one point or another. This bill is an opportunity to work together to quickly find those children. Once they are found, the real work of fixing the systems that led to the child going missing from care continues, but this is the first step we must take. I urge you to vote in favor of HB 2553 to protect the safety of Kansas children.

³ Kansas Appleseed analysis of DCF. "Youth Recovery Reports." 2023.
<https://www.dcf.ks.gov/Agency/YRR/Pages/default.aspx>