

Testimony of:

Gina Meier-Hummel, Secretary for Kansas Department for Children and Families

Testimony on:

HB 2687: Adoption Protection Act

Chair Barker, Vice Chair Highland, Ranking Member Ruiz and Members of the Committee:

House Bill 2687 creates the Adoption Protection Act related to the placement of children in foster care or those available for adoption. The bill is described as relating to the religious freedoms of “private entities providing such placement services”. Importantly, such states as Virginia, Michigan, Texas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Mississippi and Alabama have all passed similar legislation into law.

The bill proposes, subject to applicable State and federal law, no Child Placing Agency (CPA) shall be required to be involved, as set out in the bill, in the placement of a child for foster care or adoption when the proposed placement of such child would violate such agency’s “sincerely held religious beliefs”.

The bill further proposes no CPA shall be denied a license, permit or renewal of a license or permit; or experience revocation or suspension of same; or be denied any grant, contract or participation in any State agency program “solely because of the agency’s objection to” participating in the described type of placements that “violate such agency’s sincerely-held religious beliefs”. This would provide protection to all “sincerely held religious beliefs”, regardless of the specific “religion” to which such beliefs are connected, thus potentially expanding the number of agencies to do this important work. The allowance of protecting sincerely-held religious beliefs protects not only existing faith-based CPAs, but allows for possible expansion of faith-based CPAs.

Many millions of dollars (Title IV-E funding) are provided to DCF, the State’s child welfare agency, related to federal government programs to ensure federal and State outcomes for safety, permanency and well-being of children in foster care. Locating and maintaining safe and appropriate placements for children while in the custody of DCF is one of the responsibilities of the agency. By passing this bill, it is an opportunity for additional CPAs that have had concerns of working in Kansas in the past, to come along side DCF to locate and maintain homes in which to place Kansas’ children.

With more than 7,000 children currently in the custody of the Secretary, it is imperative DCF advocates for policies and statutes that help create an environment for more CPAs, not less. This bill addresses possible barriers that may be keeping CPAs from coming to Kansas to work with DCF.

DCF is a proponent of HB 2687. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to the Committee.