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Testimony Regarding House Bill 2264
House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

Chairman Jennings 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. We would like to advocate caution on changes to within HB 2264 that may undermine community-based alternatives to youth incarceration set forth in SB 367. This is especially important to consider as many aspects of SB 367 haven't taken effect yet as the law is only in the initial stages of implementation. The law should remain unchanged so the state can fund community-based alternatives reliably and achieve a safer Kansas with fewer kids going back to juvenile prison.

The reasons for reforming Kansas' juvenile justice system last year remain stark. Kansas ranks 6th worst in the nation for the over-confinement of children. The system used taxpayer dollars inefficiently by sending kids to expensive out-of-home confinement – the least effective way to deal with juvenile offenses. Two-thirds of the juvenile justice budget – about \$53 million a year – was spent on putting juveniles in out-of-home placements, while only a little over 2% of the budget went to preventing juvenile offenses in the first place. Any significant rollback of the reforms put into place last year puts us right back where we started.

We encourage caution on rolling back key aspects of the legislation as it may jeopardize the funding stream to implement it and would mean a return to ineffective use of taxpayer dollars on an outdated juvenile justice system we know doesn't work.

- **Putting kids back in prison doesn't work.** 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. If changes to the law put youth back in incarceration, it would jeopardize the dollars set aside for more effective programs.
- **Fiscal sustainability is happening as envisioned.** The recent announcement of a planned \$6 million to be transferred into the Juvenile Justice Improvement Fund shows that efforts to invest in youth decarceration are fiscally sustainable and successful. Changes to the legislation could undercut these efforts.
- **Rollback means a return to ineffective use of dollars on a failed system.** Community-based alternative programs such as Functional Family Therapy return \$13 for each dollar invested. Alternatives to youth incarceration are cost-effective and outcome-oriented.

Kansas' reforms to the juvenile justice system were guided by the careful study of data by the Juvenile Justice Workgroup. Turning our backs on it now and so early would be akin to locking up some Kansas kids and throwing away the key. We respectfully request that the Committee keep the bill as much in its current form as possible to ensure a stable funding stream for community-based alternatives to incarceration, which more effectively uses taxpayer dollars and produces better outcomes for Kansas kids.