

# Protecting Kansas Children: A closer look at the legislation

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## AGENDA

August 23, 2023

- 10:00 a.m.**            **Welcome & Introduction**  
*Linda J. Sheppard, J.D.*, Strategy Team Leader, Kansas Health Institute
- 10:03 a.m.**            **Panel Discussion - Lawmakers and Agency Officials: 2023 Kansas Legislative Session Highlights and 2024 Outlook**  
Moderator: *Linda J. Sheppard, J.D.*, Strategy Team Leader, Kansas Health Institute  
*Representative Susan Concannon*, Kansas House of Representatives  
*Secretary Laura Howard*, Kansas Department for Children and Families  
*Representative Susan Humphries*, Kansas House of Representatives  
*Kerrie Lonard, J.D.*, Child Advocate, Kansas Division of the Child Advocate  
*Senator Kristen O'Shea*, Kansas Senate
- 10:50 a.m.**            **Break (transition to second panel)**
- 10:53 a.m.**            **Panel Discussion - Child Welfare Advocacy Organizations: 2023 Kansas Legislative Session Highlights and 2024 Outlook**  
Moderator: *Valentina Blanchard, M.P.H., L.M.S.W.*, Analyst, Kansas Health Institute  
*Mike Fonkert*, Deputy Director, Kansas Appleseed  
*Kristalle Hedrick*, Vice President of Kansas Programs, FosterAdopt Connect  
*Rachel Marsh*, CEO, Children's Alliance of Kansas  
*John Wilson*, President, Kansas Action for Children
- 11:25 a.m.**            **Closing Remarks**
- 11:30 a.m.**            **Adjourn**



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# ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

## PANEL DISCUSSION - LAWMAKERS AND AGENCY OFFICIALS: 2023 KANSAS LEGISLATIVE SESSION HIGHLIGHTS AND 2024 OUTLOOK

*Listed in alphabetical order by last name*



**Representative Susan Concannon** is a six-term state representative, serving a rural district in north central Kansas. Rep. Concannon is Chair of the Committee on Child Welfare and Foster Care. She also serves on the Appropriations and Judiciary committees. Rep. Concannon is the Chair/Vice Chair (alternate years with the Senate) of the Child Welfare System Oversight Committee. She is a member of the Robert G. (Bob) Bethell Joint Committee on Home and Community Based Services and KanCare Oversight and the 2023 Special Committee on Child Care Centers and Child Care Homes. Rep. Concannon also is involved in the Council of State Governments Midwest, where she co-chairs the committee on Health & Human Services. Rep. Concannon was selected for the following legislative leadership learning opportunities: Kansas Leadership Center's Leadership and Legacy Program, Boway Institute for Legislative Leadership Development, Henry Toll Fellowship Program, and the Milbank Foundation Emerging Leaders Program. Rep. Concannon studied at Bethany College, where she achieved a bachelor of arts degree in psychology. Prior to running for office, Rep. Concannon served as the Executive Director of Mitchell County Regional Medical Foundation. She resides in Beloit with her husband, Craig. They have three grown children and five grandsons.



**Secretary Laura Howard** is the Secretary of the Kansas Department for Children and Families and the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services. Her distinguished career in public service spans over 30 years of government and human service work. She has previously held positions as a Special Assistant, Deputy Secretary and Chief of Staff for the former Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. She also has served as the Regional Administrator for Region VII of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Throughout these years of service, she has served on various state and federal committees applying her experience and expertise to many areas of human services. Just before coming back to serve as Secretary at DCF and KDADS, Sec. Howard served as the Director of the University of Kansas Public Management Center. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in public administration from Miami University and a law degree from the University of Kansas.



**Representative Susan Humphries** is serving her fourth term in the Kansas House of Representatives, representing east Wichita and Andover. She is a member of the Child Welfare System Oversight Committee and has served as Vice Chair of the Children and Seniors Committee. As an adoption attorney, Rep. Humphries has focused her efforts in the Kansas House on permanency and best outcomes for children and on encouraging best practices in a complicated child welfare system. She is also an adoptive mother and grandmother.



**Kerrie Lonard** serves as Child Advocate in the Division of the Child Advocate. Previously, she spent 14 years with Kansas Legal Services, with a focus on poverty law and access to justice issues, serving as both Staff Attorney and Managing Attorney, where she supervised staff in providing legal assistance in the areas of housing, consumer, public benefits and child and family law matters. Lonard has represented children and youth as Guardian ad Litem (GAL), as well as parents and interested parties in Child in Need of Care proceedings. Prior to earning a law degree, Lonard worked as a school social worker for five years, and in other foster care and child advocate roles, including as a CASA volunteer. She earned a bachelor of social work degree from the University of Kansas, a master of social work degree from Washburn University and is a graduate of Washburn University School of Law. Lonard has served as a GAL on the Kansas Supreme Court Task Force on Permanency Planning, as Panel Member and Chair for the CAPTA Citizen Review Panel: Intake to Petition/ CJA Taskforce, and presently serves as the State Coordinator for Kansas for the National Association of Counsel for Children.



**Senator Kristen O'Shea** serves on the Senate Public Health and Welfare, Education, and Commerce committees. Through her business, O'Shea Strengths Coaching, she works as a trainer, coach and consultant for individuals and teams from corporate, nonprofit, government and faith-based organizations. Her one-on-one coaching and team workshops are designed to energize, engage, and inspire employees to identify their strengths and put them to work to do what they do best every day.

## PANEL DISCUSSION - CHILD WELFARE ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS: 2023 KANSAS LEGISLATIVE SESSION HIGHLIGHTS AND 2024 OUTLOOK

*Listed in alphabetical order by last name*



**Mike Fonkert** is Deputy Director of Kansas Appleseed. Fonkert also oversees Kansas Appleseed's policy initiatives and manages the work of the Just Campaign. In this role, he works with directly impacted communities, policymakers and legislators to identify needs in communities that can be addressed through policy change, specifically focused on juvenile and criminal justice and child welfare. Fonkert is a graduate of the University of Kansas and lives in Lawrence with his wife, his one-year-old son and their dog.



**Kristalle Hedrick** serves as the Vice President of Kansas Programs with FosterAdoptConnect. Hedrick has dedicated her personal and professional life to supporting children and families in Kansas impacted by the child welfare system. After many years walking alongside families through family preservation, foster care reunification, and adoption services, she and her spouse became foster parents and have adopted four children. She leverages her personal and professional experience to offer advocacy, training, consultation and support in pursuit of a more equitable and effective family well-being system. She holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Pittsburg State University and a master's degree in social work from Missouri State University.



**Rachel Marsh** is Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. She brings 20 years of experience serving across all aspects of the child welfare system in Kansas. Marsh has worked as a front-line social worker to children in foster care; as a Child in Need of Care, adoption and family law attorney; and as a policy advocate for systems and communities that support child and family well-being. She currently serves on the Juvenile Offender/Child in Need of Care Advisory Committee to the Kansas Judicial Council. Marsh received her law degree and masters in social work from Washington University in St. Louis. She lives with her two daughters in Lawrence and enjoys spending time hiking local trails.



**John Wilson** is the President and CEO of Kansas Action for Children (KAC), a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. KAC works across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families. Prior to joining KAC, Wilson was a member of the Kansas House of Representatives for five years where he served as the Democratic Caucus Policy Chair and was the ranking member on the Health & Human Services and Children & Seniors committees. He started the bipartisan, bicameral Healthy Kansans Caucus, and worked to increase transparency and collaboration within the Legislature. Wilson spent eleven years with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation — a partnership between the American

Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation. During that time, he coordinated strategic partnerships with corporations and celebrities, co-developed a national strategy for increasing physical activity and healthy eating in out-of-school time sites, developed their youth engagement strategy, created the first-ever national youth advisory board focused on eliminating childhood obesity, and designed a youth-focused community organizing curriculum focused on addressing the social and political influencers of health. Wilson holds a bachelor's degree in design from the University of Kansas. The best parts of his day are when he's spending time with his wife, Jami, and their two sons, Parker and Henry.



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