

# Juvenile justice reformers request return of \$6 million diverted to KDHE

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Posted Feb 1, 2019 at 7:03 PM Updated Feb 1, 2019 at 7:03 PM

Former state Sen. Greg Smith pleaded with a Senate budget committee for restoration of \$6 million transferred to the state's health department from an account established to finance programs capable of reducing incarceration of juveniles.

Kansas lawmakers passed a sweeping reform law in 2016 to reduce the reliance on expensive out-of-home juvenile placements and to funnel state budget savings of about \$30 million into community initiatives that lowered juvenile recidivism and improved public safety.

Smith, who represented Johnson County in the Legislature, said a bill adopted close of the 2018 session enabled \$6 million in the juvenile justice savings account to be allocated to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. He said the 2019 Legislature ought to pass Senate Bill 14, which requires return of the money to juvenile offender programs under the Kansas Department of Corrections.

"We are worried about the reinvestment funds we have worked hard to collect and are working even harder to spend in appropriate, responsible, evidence-based ways," Smith said.

He said the Legislature's appetite for sweeping money could jeopardize reform of the state's juvenile justice system "not because it is not an effective approach, but because it was cut off at the knees."

In 2007, Smith's teenage daughter, Kelsey, was abducted in Overland Park and found slain in Missouri. Her death led to passage of laws in many states requiring telecommunications companies to help locate cellular telephones and assist law enforcement searching for missing people.

The Kansas Center for Economic Growth and the Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice both endorsed the Senate bill mandating return of the \$6 million.

"The repurposing of these funds does not honor the original intent," said Emily Fetsch, policy director at the Center for Economic Growth. "Kansas should not move backward by misappropriating funds intended specifically for funding programs known to be effective in reducing recidivism."