

To: Matthew Billinger, Juvenile Justice Oversight Committee, Coordinator

Kansas Department of Corrections

From: Mary Ann Scali, Executive Director, The Gault Center

Re: Update JJOC grant funding: April 1, 2025- June 30, 2025

Date: 7/15/25

Accomplishments & Current Initiatives:

Goal 1: Develop Kansas-Specific Youth Defense Standards

In this reporting period, Meredith Schnug updated the draft of the Kansas Youth Defense Standards with proposed edits from Gault Center Staff. Professor Schnug also reached out and the Gault Center contracted with two youth defense practitioners who will review the Standards over the summer to provide additional feedback from a front-line perspective. The practitioners will submit their feedback in August for Professor Schnug and the Gault Center to review and incorporate changes. During this time, Professor Schnug will also draft an executive summary to provide a concise, layperson's overview for individuals who are interested in understanding why Youth Defense Practice Standards are an important and necessary part of upholding young people's constitutional rights in juvenile court in Kansas.

Additionally, we have hired a KU law student as an extern over the summer to conduct legal citation and substance checks for the Standards. When we asked the extern why she was interested in working on Kansas Youth Defense Standards, she indicated that she had attended the Gault Center and KU's "Youth Defense Pipeline" webinar in February of this year (funded by our work with KAG), and that solidified her desire to be a youth defender!

Finally, once the Standards are finalized this fall, we will discuss strategies and opportunities to educate decision makers on the importance of adopting the Standards, and further education and training efforts around the Standards.

Goal 2: Statewide Youth Defense System and Workgroup

In this reporting period, the Gault Center launched the Statewide Youth Defense System Workgroup. We invited over thirty individuals to join the Workgroup. On May 2, 2025, twenty-six individuals attended the inaugural meeting held virtually, and engaged in a very robust and productive discussion! Participants included representatives from BIDS executive leadership, the judiciary, Kansas Association of Counties, the JJOC and KAG committees, policy groups, system-impacted young people, individual youth defenders, probation staff, county prosecutors, and a clinical professor from KU. The inaugural discussion centered around building relationships among members, developing a shared understanding of the current state of youth defense in Kansas, and hearing from Heather Cessna, the Executive Director of BIDS, about BIDS' goals to create a Youth Defense pilot program. The information was well received, and support for a statewide youth defense system was apparent throughout.

Following the meeting, Gault Center staff connected with several Workgroup members to discuss the next best steps in moving this work forward. We will continue to meet with decisionmakers

throughout the summer to brainstorm strategies and ways to support the creation of a youth defense system in Kansas.

We will hold our next and first in-person statewide workgroup meeting on September 12, 2025, in Topeka, Kansas at the Bishop Professional Development Center. The goal for the September meeting is to create actionable next steps for supporting the creation of a youth defense pilot. At the meeting, we will build on May's brainstorming around the creation of a statewide youth defense system. To help inform those discussions, and as part of this deliverable's goal to "educate decision makers about the importance of youth defense specialization," we will provide members a facilitated, firsthand perspective into the challenges youth face in the legal system through an experiential learning led by the Youth Experiential Learning Simulation team. This session will include young people from Kansas who have experience in the legal system and will be followed by a presentation from Progeny Youth leaders on results from the Youth Voice Qualitative Data Study project (more information included below).

In addition to the workgroup, the Gault Center continues to work with individuals across the state to provide education around the importance of specialized youth defense. The information below supports this second goal.

In this reporting period, Gault Center staff analyzed the data obtained in the Youth Voice Qualitative Data Study project. The findings from the study are being incorporated into a report that will also include findings from the *2020 Kansas State Assessment*. By analyzing these findings side by side, the report will illuminate both system improvements and ongoing gaps requiring attention. The report will also include recommendations to guide the State of Kansas in moving forward. To ensure the final report is accessible to a range of readers, the Gault Center is working with a designer on the final publication, which will also include artwork by two young people from Kansas to illustrate the data and lived experiences of the young people interviewed. The Gault Center is working diligently to complete this educational publication ahead of our September Statewide Youth Defense Committee meeting allowing us to first share it with the statewide committee before utilizing the material in subsequent educational efforts.