



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 2901		DATE: 2/2/2026	
COMMITTEE: Special Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs			
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: JESSICA PETRIE		PHONE NUMBER: 573-635-6092	
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI NETWORK AGAINST CHILD ABUSE		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 1805			
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65102
EMAIL: jessica@wintonpolicygroup.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 11:26 AM	
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: In-Person		SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 11:59 PM
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BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 11:55 PM
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I am Opposed to this Bill and yet another Committee. The House of Representatives and the State Senate already have Committees doing work and covering these issues.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: SARAH BERRY		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/1/2026 9:23 AM
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Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony in strong opposition to HB 2901.

While the bill is framed as a child-protection measure, in practice it recreates a powerless oversight committee that already existed, already expired, and already failed to prevent harm.

HB 2901 does not fix Missouri’s child abuse and neglect system — it institutionalizes delay, diffuses responsibility, and shields existing failures from accountability.

1. This bill revives a failed structure

HB 2901 repeals and reenacts Section 21.771, removing the prior sunset clause that allowed the Joint Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect to expire in 2023.

That matters.

The committee did not expire because child abuse was solved — it expired because study without enforcement does not protect children. Reviving the same committee, with the same limitations, and expecting different outcomes is not reform — it is legislative theater.

2. The committee has no enforcement power

Under HB 2901, the committee may:

- Study
- Analyze
- Examine
- Recommend
- Report

It may not:

- Subpoena witnesses or records
- Compel agency testimony
- Enforce corrective action
- Mandate transparency
- Strip immunity

**Refer misconduct for prosecution
Protect whistleblowers
Impose consequences when children are harmed**

A committee that can only “recommend” action cannot stop abuse in real time.

Children are not harmed by lack of reports — they are harmed when known failures face no consequences.

3. Oversight without independence is not oversight

**The committee is composed entirely of legislators overseeing:
Agencies they already fund
Statutes they already wrote
Systems they already control**

If the Children’s Division, juvenile courts, or foster systems are failing, the General Assembly already possesses the authority to correct those failures directly. Creating a separate committee to “study” problems of legislative design is a way to delay responsibility, not exercise it.

4. “Structured decision making” has become a liability shield

HB 2901 emphasizes “structured decision making regarding the removal of a child from a home.”

**In practice, these frameworks are routinely used to:
Justify harmful decisions after the fact
Protect agencies from liability
Reduce complex human realities to checklists and scores**

Children are not protected by better paperwork.

They are protected by accountability when judgment fails.

This bill strengthens process — not protection.

5. Survivors, families, and whistleblowers are excluded

**HB 2901 includes:
No survivor representation
No former foster youth
No parents wrongfully separated
No mandated reporters
No independent child advocates**

A child abuse committee without lived-experience voices is institutional self-review, not child-centered oversight.

6. Missouri does not have a “study” problem — it has an accountability problem

**Missouri has:
Reports
Data
Audits
Task forces
Committees
Findings**

**What it lacks is:
Enforceable standards
Transparent consequences
External review
Whistleblower protection**

Mandatory corrective action

HB 2901 adds another report while leaving the same power structures intact.

HB 2901 allows lawmakers to claim action without changing outcomes. It revives a committee that already failed, grants it no authority, excludes affected voices, and offers no protection to children currently at risk.

Children do not need another committee.

They need courage, consequences, and enforceable protection.

Respectfully submitted,

A Missouri citizen advocating for real child protection — not oversight theater.

-Rev. Sarah M. Berry

Footnotes: [1] Missouri Revised Statutes § 21.771 (prior version)

The prior Joint Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect included a sunset provision expiring January 15, 2023, which HB 2901 repeals and removes.

[2] Missouri General Assembly, HB 2901 (103rd Gen. Assem.)

HB 2901 grants the Joint Committee authority to study, analyze, and recommend changes, but contains no subpoena power, enforcement authority, or mandatory corrective mechanisms.

[3] Missouri Children's Division – Statutory Authority (Chapter 210, RSMo)

The Children's Division operates under statutory authority already controlled by the General Assembly, including funding, reporting requirements, and procedural mandates.

[4] U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)

GAO reports on child welfare oversight repeatedly note that oversight bodies lacking enforcement authority are limited in their ability to correct systemic failures.

(See, e.g., GAO reports on child welfare accountability and federal-state oversight models.)

[5] National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

NCSL analyses of child welfare reform highlight that independent oversight bodies with subpoena power and public reporting requirements are more effective than advisory-only committees.

[6] Missouri Office of the State Auditor – Performance Audit Principles

Oversight mechanisms lacking corrective authority are commonly identified as structural weaknesses in government accountability systems.