

State of Kansas

Senate Chamber



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KANSAS OVERSIGHT

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Senate Minority Whip

March 5, 2024

Pat Pettey

Senator, District 6, Kansas Legislature

Proponent Written-Only Testimony on HB2785

House Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development Committee

Chair Tarwater and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2785. I am testifying as a parent and grandparent, an educator with over 36 years of experience in the classroom, as well as a Kansas legislator for 16 years. I currently serve as the ranking minority member of Ways and Means, as well as the chair of the Early Learning Caucus. Additionally, I had the privilege of serving on Gov Kelly's Early Childhood Transition Task Force.

HB 2785 supports the recommendation of the bipartisan Early Childhood Transition Task Force to consolidate childcare services. This bill is aligned with the needs of stakeholders across the state, from families to providers to employers. Kansas currently has an inefficient and fragmented early childhood governance system, as shown by our ranking of 49th in system efficiency. By passing this bill, we can change the trajectory of early childhood governance in our state, thus changing the trajectory of quality of life for Kansas' most precious resource – her children. We can do this by consolidating existing childcare programs into a single state entity, including the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, home visitation programs, and Head Start programs. This consolidation would promote transparency, provide quality services, and eliminate redundancies as well as service gaps.

Consolidating services will pay dividends for our children, their families, and the entire state. This model will make accessibility to services and programs easier to navigate, especially for young families. Greater accessibility for families, coupled with streamlined oversight for childcare providers, is a winning combination. Top-notch childcare services should be a priority of every Kansan who wants to strengthen the economy by attracting and retaining quality workers in communities throughout the state, cut through bureaucratic red tape, and increase government accountability and effective policymaking.

Consolidating childcare services is proving a positive move in many other states, including Missouri, North Dakota, Alabama, and Georgia. I believe that passing HB 2785, a bill that unifies early childhood governance to strengthen Kansas families, shows that Kansas has a robust comprehensive plan for the future of childcare in our state.

I ask for your vote to pass HB 2785 favorably to the full House.

Sincerely,

Senator Pat Pettey

Senator, District 6, Kansas Legislature