



To: Chairman Tarwater and members of the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development  
From: David Jordan, President and CEO, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund  
Date: March 6, 2024  
RE: Proponent Testimony for HB 2785

**Chairman Tarwater and members of the Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of HB 2785, which unifies Kansas' many early childhood programs and services under the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Access to high-quality child care is necessary for Kansas children and our economy to be able to thrive. It is critically important for working parents of young children to be able to find quality affordable child care because it aids healthy child development and allows them to return to the workforce.

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a 37-year-old, \$60-million health philanthropy located in Hutchinson. Our mission is to improve the health of all Kansans. We focus on three strategic areas—access to care, Thriving Children, and Engaged Congregations and Communities, a program aimed at addressing community health by engaging churches throughout Kansas.

A key component of our work is supporting all Kansans to ensure they have the opportunity to thrive, which is why we support consolidating early childhood services in the proposed OEC. By supporting this proposal, the state of Kansas will speak through action how vitally important it is to maintain families and protect children. 90% of brain development occurs before the age of five and that is why making the early childhood system more efficient and easier to navigate is crucial to support Kansas families.

We support the proposed investments in the OEC:

- The OEC will usher in collaboration among organizations responsible for Kansas children and families. With the adoption of this consolidation, red tape will be cut, bureaucracy will function smoother and it will result in systemic change that will better serve all involved. This Office will result in better accountability without any significant expansion in government. This unifying of agencies comes from the recommendations from the bipartisan Early Childhood Task Force.
- Upon consolidation into the OEC, families will be able to access information, services and resources more efficiently. This will result in a healthier and safer Kansas. It is our goal to encourage programs that foster improvement in early childhood development and child care because families thrive when given effective resources. This Office will minimize difficulties in navigating the system and limit wasted time and effort lost in the current bureaucratic maze.
- This consolidation will give child care providers a better and more effective roadmap in accessing resources they need to serve their communities. Currently, providers are subject to oversight from multiple agencies. Unifying these agencies will streamline this process creating a better result for both providers and families.

We support HB 2785 and hope that you will join us in supporting this important legislation that will improve access to quality early childhood programs in Kansas. Thank you for your consideration.