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**DATE: March 6, 2024**  
**TO: House Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Committee**  
**FROM: Andrea Eliot, Greater Wichita YMCA Child Care & Camp Director, obo Kansas State Alliance of YMCAs**  
**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 2785**

Chair Tarwater and Honorable Members of the House Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Committee:

Hello and good afternoon. My name is Andrea Eliot, and I am the Branch Director for Child Care & Camp with the Greater Wichita YMCA. I am here today on behalf of the Kansas State Alliance of YMCAs and our Child Care Task Force to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2785, which would consolidate child care programs and services into the newly created Office of Early Childhood.

The Kansas State Alliance of YMCAs is made up of 10 YMCA associations located in more than 25 communities and hundreds of program sites across the state. As one of the largest child care providers in Kansas, the Y appreciates this opportunity to discuss the potential impact of this bill on our Y programs, both early learning AND school age (out-of-school-time, OST).

As background and reference, in 2023, Kansas YMCAs provided child care for:

- 3,735 children in 19 early learning programs (birth – age 5);
- 6,613 youth in 101 before/afterschool programs (ages 5 – 12); and
- 8,781 kids in 28 summer day and overnight camps (ages 5-17)

At the YMCA, all of our licensed child care programs strive to provide high quality, affordable and accessible child care services to families in communities across Kansas with a mission to serve all regardless of the ability to pay. These programs not only meet the needs of early learners, ensuring they are prepared academically and socially to enter schools, but they make a significant impact on the economy in Kansas by supporting workforce development and allowing parents to go to work knowing their kids are in a safe place.

Since Kansas Ys offer both early learning and school age programs, we are touched and impacted by almost all of the child services and programs slated to be consolidated under the proposed Office of Early Childhood. We support the Administration's effort with this bill to reduce the bureaucratic burden and inefficiencies that arise trying to navigate the four different agencies currently responsible for the various components of the child care system. The streamlining of child care and education services into one agency will help our YMCAs serve more Kansas families and children, while also reducing the number of obstacles the families we serve face when attempting to find quality care.

While the Kansas YMCAs support House Bill 2785, we would like to take this opportunity to remind the Committee that the entire "child care system" is a much broader universe than what seems to be outlined in this specific bill. Much of the bill's language, scope, and even the new agency's name is "early childhood" centric and seems to be somewhat dismissive of the value and role of school age/OST programs in our state. The unifying of critical child care services under one umbrella should be inclusive of all organizations who provide care, no matter the age of the children they serve.

In addition, over the last 10 months our YMCA Child Care Task Force (comprised of all the YMCA child care directors in the state) has worked very collaboratively with KDHE through the agency's comprehensive rules and regulations review process for both early childhood and school age licensees, and we have been extremely pleased how the newly proposed regulations have incorporated many of our language and policy suggestions. As this promulgation process is still ongoing, we urge the Committee to ensure that passage of this bill does not stymie any of those proposed regulatory improvements.

YMCAs play a critical role in the Kansas child care system, and as such, we remain committed to staying engaged with both the Administration and the Legislature as this bill moves forward to ensure the consolidation of child care services into one agency reduces burdens placed on families, increases accountability for childhood programs, and eliminates inefficiencies and gaps in service.

Thank you for your consideration.