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Paula Neth, President & CEO  
The Family Conservancy  
Written-Only Proponent testimony for HB 2179  
House Committee on Welfare Reform

Dear Chairperson Averkamp and Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2179 on behalf of The Family Conservancy (TFC). My name is Paula Neth, President and CEO of TFC.

The first five years of a child's life mark the most important period of human development — determining emotional resilience, health outcomes, school readiness, and future career success. Investments such as high-quality child care during this period pay dividends. Nobel prize winning economist [James Heckman has estimated this return as high as 13 percent per year.](#)

Unfortunately, in Kansas, far too many children lack access to high-quality care and its amazing benefits. Let's not forget that the vast majority of this program is funded by the federal government, and it is frequently underutilized. Kansans have already made the investment, but a burdensome system and poor policy are preventing them from realizing the return. HB 2179 would improve access for some of the Kansas children who need it the most and put federal tax dollars to work in Kansas.

TFC has been an active advocate for access to quality, affordable early education for all Kansas families. Additionally, we have provided mental health therapy and case management services for over 50 years. The majority of our clients have experienced trauma – many times in the form of domestic violence.

### **Our Team's First-hand Experiences**

Beginning in 2018, with funding from the state of Kansas, TFC began assisting Wyandotte County parents in accessing state child care subsidy. We have found that child care subsidy can be a powerful tool enabling families to build stability and provide better environments for their children during the critical early developmental period.

Without access to stable child care support, parents oftentimes piece together several different options, which – aside from potential health and safety concerns – does not provide the continuity and structure young children need. Further, without access to the reliable, affordable care that subsidy enables, families' ability to build and advance their careers and earning potential is seriously inhibited. Research estimates the economic impact of insufficient child care on parents, employers, and taxpayers at [\\$57 billion dollars every year.](#)

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TFC's child care subsidy support team has encountered restrictions that place disproportionate burdens on mothers and their young children. Most notably, the requirement to coordinate with child support services in order to access child care subsidy benefits. An estimated 1 out of every 10 applicants choose not to apply for subsidy due to concerns around pursuing a formal child support case. In all of our experiences, it has been the mother seeking support.

TFC has seen first-hand how this requirement prevents single mothers and young children from receiving the support they need. After witnessing several mothers abandon the child care subsidy application process upon learning of the child support cooperation requirement, our subsidy support team connected with our team of mental health professionals, who specialize in psychological trauma and domestic violence. They found a common theme: mothers would forego child support because doing so could put themselves or their family at risk.

It is important for victims of domestic violence to regain a sense of power and control in their lives. They have lived (oftentimes, years) in a situation where their power and control was stripped from them. They should be able to choose for themselves and their family when and if to pursue child support. Tying benefits to this choice is manipulative and dangerous.

In closing, our experience with the current restrictions, specifically the requirement to cooperate with child support services, diminishes the true purpose of the child care subsidy program. This is about children, and there are significant long-term costs associated with failing to meet children's needs early in life. According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education, 13 percent of Kansas children fail to graduate high school on time. Research shows that high-quality early care and education significantly improves educational achievement. The potential benefit of providing high-quality care far outweighs the value of collecting past due child support. We ask that you support HB 2179 and other efforts to increase access to high-quality and affordable child care to all Kansans. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be glad to engage in dialog around this topic.

Sincerely,



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