



March 6, 2024

Tanya Koehn, Interim Executive Director
Child Care Aware of Kansas
Verbal & Written, Proponent for HB 2785
House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Chairman Tarwater and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of HB 2785, which unifies many early childhood programs and services under the Office of Early Childhood. Child Care Aware of Kansas is a network of child care resources and referral agencies working to ensure that all young children and their families have access to affordable, high-quality early care and education.

Together, the CCR&R network:

- Connects **families** to available child care via customized referral services.
- Connects **community** stakeholders to the information, perspectives, and ideas they need to tackle the lack of affordable, high-quality child care at the local level.
- Supports **child care providers** with coaching, technical assistance, and professional development to improve the quality of early learning, enhance the health and safety of child care environments, and strengthen business practices.

Quality child care is a cornerstone of early childhood development, providing children with a safe, nurturing environment where they can learn and thrive. Access to high-quality child care enables parents to pursue their careers confidently, knowing that their children are in capable hands. By investing in quality child care, we invest in the future of our children, families, and communities, fostering an environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

An Office of Early Childhood will help Kansas establish a single agency making it easy to address the unique needs of young children and their families. Here are the why Child Care Aware of Kansas supports the need to consolidate into an Office of Early Childhood:

Families: Early childhood development is vital as it lays the foundation for a child's holistic growth. The implementation of the Office of Early Childhood aims to simplify services most needed by families, thereby enabling Kansas to prioritize the promotion of healthy development during this crucial period in their child's life. The Office of Early Childhood will work to align systems to help make it easier for families to navigate.



Communities: Education readiness is paramount, as it profoundly influences a child's preparedness for school and future academic achievements. The establishment of an Office of Early Childhood would empower communities by providing organized support, resources, and advocacy, thereby strengthening local leadership, and enhancing outcomes for children and families across the state, allowing communities to focus more on direct engagement with families, child care providers, and other community stakeholders.

Child Care: Access to affordable, high-quality child care is essential for families with working parents. Establishing an Office of Early Childhood would consolidate oversight of child care from various agencies into one unified entity. This consolidation aims to reduce red tape obstacles that child care programs currently face in becoming licensed providers and accessing services. By streamlining processes, the office aims to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Centralizing oversight allows for a focus on expanding childcare options and elevating the quality of available childcare for families.

Currently, Child Care Aware of Kansas manages funding from multiple state agencies simultaneously, that require monthly, quarterly, and annual reporting to each agency, each with unique requirements. This funding comes with the requirement to submit Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to secure funding, which can occur at overlapping times, diverting staff resources from direct engagement with children, childcare providers, and communities. Having an Office of Early Childhood would eliminate multiple reports, requests for proposals and allow us to report to one single agency, consequently giving us more time to focus our efforts on families, child care programs and families.

Overall, an Office of Early Childhood is essential for ensuring that young children have the support, resources, and opportunities they need to thrive during their early years, setting a strong foundation for future success.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tanya Koehn".

Tanya Koehn

Interim Executive Director

Child Care Aware of Kansas