

March 6, 2024

Jessica Matthies, Chair of Childcare Coalition
Cheyenne County Childcare Coalition
Written-Only Proponent Testimony 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. I lead a childcare coalition for Cheyenne County in Northwest Kansas.

Childcare Coalition of Cheyenne County was created to help bring the accurate amount of childcare and support to our area. The coalition tries to stay dedicated to communicating and supporting providers and helping them navigate through while they stay committed to their families and children.

I highly support of the Office of Early Childhood. In my ground work of supporting these providers and families it has been a struggle and a frustration. Many of them would simply want to give up or get out of the profession with obstacles and misleading information. Implementing one system eliminates confusion, frustration. It also creates accountability for the providers and those employed by OEC. I know that will help create consistency in the positions held by OEC because there will be one line of command. I know from personal experience how many times I saw turnover in these departments. That created exasperation in many even myself when trying to help providers' complete tasks needed to run accurately. Many providers that have been in this field for years in our community are ready to be done. Not due to retirement age but the loop holes they are having to go through to keep up with the regulations.

If we can create unity within the authority, it improves overall productivity and accountability. This system has got to help these families and providers be able to maneuver through the process to help them be successful and still have energy to thrive at home. Everyone in the childcare community even grandparents involved would say there needs to be a change in the early childcare community. If the support was there from the state level, I feel that local services would be so much stronger and effective in the community leading to a positive effect creating positive actions in your community and many working together. Speaking from the local leadership side, I will be honest to say that at times I put some of the state level work in a pile because it is never consistent who I will be communicating with and what the process is so I tend to want to procrastinate on some issues until absolutely necessary.

Bottom line is many individuals are in the work force now and childcare is not a suggestion it is a necessity. So why are we setting up our families and providers to fail giving them a broken system. We need to stand up for our families and providers. Success begins at the start of life not at the end. I am a strong proponent for the Office of Early Childhood.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today, please hear our cry for better. Our families and providers deserve the best. If your outcome of our state is to be the best than we need to give the best.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at director@cckcf.org