

February 7, 2018

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2639
Kansas House Children and Seniors Committee

Dear Chair Davis and Members of the Committee:

I am a parent who resides in Johnson County. My husband and I are raising two children who presently are school age. I support House Bill 2639 and admonish you to do so as well. Comprehensive background checks offer an additional layer of assurance that adults working with our youngest citizens in child care settings do not have a history that would potentially put the health and safety of children in their purview at risk.

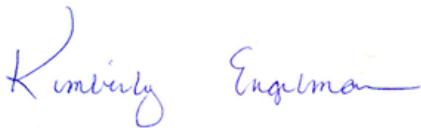
Unfortunately, I know all too well, the importance of safety measures in early care settings. You see, in 2004, the Kansas child care system and a licensed family child care home provider in Mission, KS severely let our family down when our firstborn daughter, Lexie, died as a result of a preventable injury she received during her 3rd day when left unsupervised by the child care home owner/operator. Lexie was 13 months old when she died and she took pieces of our hearts with her. This child care provider remains on the Kansas child abuse and neglect list of prohibited providers and, if she should choose to try to do so, would not be allowed to work in or operate a child care facility or family child care home: her Kansas background would be checked and her name would be discovered as a prohibited provider. However, if this former family child care home provider moved across the state line, she likely could slide under the radar and work in, volunteer, reside in, or operate a child care facility once again. While comprehensive background checks are not a complete stop gap, they are a critical piece of early care and education system supports that, when layered within other child care regulations and requirements, help make early care and education settings a place where children thrive and learn while their parents are in the workforce.

The first five years of life serve as a unique window of opportunity in which a child's neural pathways grow at an unprecedented rate; 90% of a child's brain develops by the time he/she reaches 5 years of age. Research shows that adverse childhood events have drastic ill effects on a child's developmental trajectory and lifelong success. Such adverse events may be more likely to occur if adults with backgrounds that put the health and welfare of children at risk work, reside or volunteer in early care and education settings, Comprehensive background checks better ensure that children in child care are safe and secure and simply make good sense.

Since my daughter's preventable death that was caused by an inattentive licensed child care provider, I have advocated on behalf of other Kansas families with young children in early care and education settings. My advocacy efforts and that of other families and professional organizations around the State led to the passage of Kansas' comprehensive child care law, named in honor of my daughter; Lexie's Law. I have since continued to advocate in Kansas and have had the privilege of advocating at the federal level in Washington, D.C. as well. Lexie's story, and tragic stories from other parents (from Kansas and from across the nation) served to contextualize the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reauthorized in 2014. This is the federal law that has required and catalyzed comprehensive background checks in every state.

Please make the necessary administrative adjustments to simplify the process of background checks and pave the way for Kansas to be in alignment with CCDBG comprehensive background check requirements. I hope that you will support HB 2639 and help move it along through this legislative session in swift manner. No matter your political viewpoint, safe child care is something that we all can get around and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kimberly Engelman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kim Engelman, PhD (Lexie's Mom)
Kim.Engelman@gmail.com