

March 13, 2018

Amanda Gress, Director of Government Relations
Kansas Action for Children
Verbal Testimony in Support of House Bill 2639
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Chair Schmidt and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering House Bill 2639, which would allow Kansas to continue to implement fingerprint-based criminal background checks for child care providers. Promoting safe child care environments is a critical component of making Kansas the best state to raise a child and to be a child. Kansas has a strong commitment to safe early childhood settings, including the passage of Lexie's Law legislation in 2010. Facilitating the payment of fees for fingerprint-based background checks will ensure Kansas can implement policies to help reduce the risk of abuse and neglect to children in child care while maintaining compliance with federal law.

Conducting fingerprint-based background checks on individuals who work in child care facilities ensures greater safety for Kansas children. Last year, this Committee supported and the Legislature passed legislation to expand the criminal penalties that disqualify persons from residing, working, or regularly volunteering at Kansas child care facilities. House Bill 2639 builds on that work to allow the implementation of policies intended to protect Kansas children in regulated child care.

Implementing comprehensive, fingerprint-based background checks keeps Kansas in compliance with the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, which is a major source of funding for child care services in the state. In 2014, Congress passed a bipartisan reauthorization of the federal child care legislation, creating the opportunity for states to improve their child care licensing policies. Federal law permits states to charge providers a fee for costs associated with processing required background checks, but prohibits states from charging more than the actual cost of performing the check. If they choose, states may use federal funds to pay background check fees for child care providers. Facilitating the implementation of these fingerprint-based background checks is an important step to ensure Kansas will continue to receive federal funding for the state's child care infrastructure and the child care assistance program for working families.

709 S Kansas | Suite 200
Topeka, KS 66603

P: 785-232-0550 | F: 785-232-0699
kac@kac.org | www.kac.org

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Kansas Action for Children supports House Bill 2639 to protect Kansas children in child care.

The 2010 passage of Lexie's Law established Kansas as a national leader in health and safety standards for our child care facilities. House Bill 2639 allows the implementation of state protections that will reduce the likelihood that a dangerous individual would have access to children in Kansas child care facilities. As this Committee works to address child care policy, please do not hesitate to contact Kansas Action for Children by emailing me (amanda@kac.org) if we can answer questions or otherwise be of assistance.