

**House Committee on Commerce, Labor, & Economic Development
 Proponent Testimony on House Substitute for Senate Bill 96
 Presented by William Wilk, Senior Director of Government Affairs**

Thursday, March 14, 2024

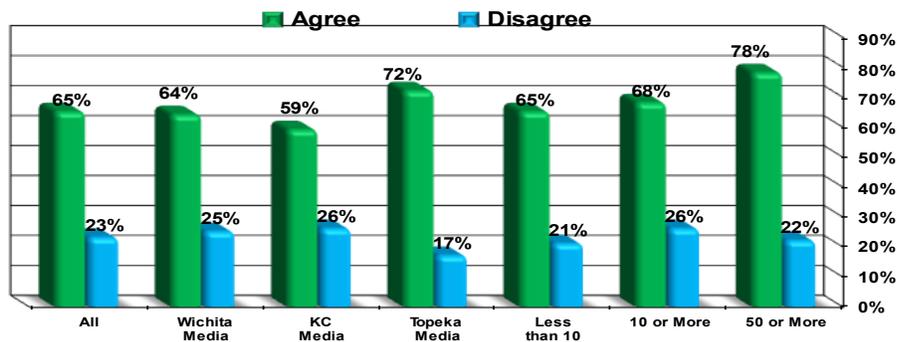
Mister Chair and members of the committee, my name is William Wilk, Senior Director of Government Affairs for the Kansas Chamber. The Kansas Chamber represents small, medium, and large-sized businesses across the state advocating for policies to improve the economic climate in Kansas. The Kansas Chamber appreciates the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on House Substitute for Senate Bill 96, establishing licensing requirements relating to capacity and staff-to-child ratios for childcare facilities in Kansas.

House Substitute for Senate Bill 96 provides modest and fair increases to the staff-to-child ratios for childcare facilities in Kansas. This issue has been brought to the attention of the legislature the past couple of years and we have been told going through the regulatory process is faster than passing a law. Currently regulation changes for staff-to-child ratios are still in the review process a year later. Kansans need solutions now when it comes to childcare.

The lack of access to quality, affordable childcare in Kansas has become an area of focus for the legislature. We applaud the efforts of the legislature expanding the access to the tax credit available for businesses that invest in facilities for employees. After the 2022 session, we started hearing more from our members expressing concerns about the lack of access to childcare for employees. This prompted us in 2022 to host a Zoom meeting with representatives from KDHE on their efforts to address this crisis. We also started asking questions in our annual CEO poll of business leaders across the state.

Childcare Keeps Kansans Out of Workforce ?

65% Agree; 23% Disagree; 12% Undecided



In our November survey from 2022, we asked if business leaders felt access to childcare was keeping Kansans out of the workforce. 65% of the 300 business owners surveyed answered yes. Kansas has some of the most restrictive provider/child ratios in the country. House Substitute for Senate Bill 96 will take the steps to increase those ratios modestly to try and balance the importance of both child safety and increased access.

The legislature passed a bill similar to House Substitute for Senate Bill 96 last year that was unfortunately vetoed by Governor Kelly. The Governor claimed the bill would reverse the progress we've made towards safe, affordable, high-quality childcare. She also said the bill would loosen safety requirements for childcare centers and prevent the state from being responsive to individual community's needs. House Substitute for Senate Bill 96 provides the solutions needed now for Kansans when it comes to childcare.

In closing, the Kansas Chamber supports any reasonable deregulation of childcare facilities when it comes to staff-to-child ratios while not sacrificing the safety of children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Substitute for Senate Bill 96, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have at the appropriate time.