



Testimony in Support of House Sub. for Senate Bill 96

**Kansas House Committee on
Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development**

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**Andrew Wiens
On behalf of
Opportunity Solutions Project**

Chairman Tarwater and Members of the Kansas House Committee on Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development:

Good afternoon! My name is Andrew Wiens with Dugan Consulting Group, speaking with you today on behalf of Opportunity Solutions Project (OSP). OSP is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization dedicated to advancing policies that reduce barriers to work, protect state benefits for the truly needy, and ensure that the government is accountable to taxpayers and citizens.

I am pleased to speak in favor of House Substitute for Senate Bill 96 today. This legislation will provide much-needed relief for working families in Kansas through long-overdue child care regulatory reform. By passing SB 96, Kansas can follow the lead of other states that have sought to “make childcare more affordable by making their staff-to-child ratios more flexible, eliminating group size limits, reducing the burden of educational requirements, and bringing more workers into the labor force.”¹

We are facing a child care crisis in Kansas, with nearly 80,000 slots needed to meet potential demand.² One commentator summarized a startling new dynamic: “Conventional wisdom holds that stay-at-home moms do so because they can afford not to work. Instead, experts say, many moms appear to be staying home with their kids because they can't afford to work” and pay for childcare.³

We believe that Kansas child care regulations are keeping some would-be child care providers out of the market and causing some existing providers to pay their workers less, charge families more, reduce available slots below their licensed capacity, or exit the market entirely. While SB 96 won't fix our child care crisis in one fell swoop, it will make significant progress in the right direction. All else being equal, the changes proposed in the bill will increase child care capacity by adding slots at essentially every age group, allow providers who serve additional children under these new ratios some breathing room to pay higher wages to child care workers, and assist in stemming the tide of child care cost increases that are pricing families out of the labor market or pushing them to seek other child care arrangements.

SB 96 represents a significant step forward in promoting the well-being of Kansas children, supporting working families, and fostering a robust and sustainable child care system. I would like to highlight several key reasons why this legislation is vital for our state:

¹ <https://thefga.org/research/covid19-highlighted-problems-in-childcare/>

² <https://ks.childcareaware.org/data-research/>

³ <https://www.cnbc.com/id/100727292>

- Reduction of burdensome regulations: The bill establishes clear definitions, staffing requirements, and licensing standards for child care centers and homes, striking a balance between ensuring safety and preventing unnecessary regulatory burdens. By streamlining regulations, the bill allows providers to focus on delivering quality care.
- Cost containment: The bill establishes reasonable professional development standards for child care staff, ensuring that providers have the necessary skills and training to deliver high-quality care. By recognizing diverse educational backgrounds and experiences, the bill promotes workforce in the child care sector. By providing flexibility in staffing requirements and licensing standards, the bill helps contain costs for child care providers and allows them to earn additional revenue for each employee on staff. This, in turn, helps keep child care costs affordable for working families, ensuring that parents can access the support they need to remain in the workforce.
- Supporting working parents: Access to affordable child care is essential for working parents to pursue employment opportunities and contribute to the state's economy. This legislation promotes accessibility to child care services by encouraging the development of pilot programs and preventing local regulations that hinder providers' ability to offer affordable care.

There is, of course, ongoing work from the Kansas Department of Health & Environment related to child care rules and regulations, and several other proposals that this committee has heard. While this is a complicated issue, I think the way forward can be condensed into a couple of broad choices. Will the Legislature choose to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into propping up our child care system? (One conferee testified to the Child Care interim committee that this body should invest \$300M as a starting point into the child care and early childhood system⁴). Or will the Legislature instead choose to relax overly-strict staffing ratios, reduce overburdensome rules and regulations, and cut red tape that is preventing child care providers from adequately and efficiently meeting the needs of working Kansas families?

SB 96 is not a fix-all that will magically wipe away all of our issues and solve our child care crisis overnight. However, the legislation is solutions-oriented—it attempts to tackle real-life barriers for child care providers that are slowly but surely constricting this industry and forcing parents to either stay out of the workforce or find less formal child care arrangements whenever and wherever they can get it. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I urge your favorable consideration of child care reform in SB 96. I am happy to stand for questions.

⁴ <https://sunflowerstatejournal.com/child-advocacy-group-says-state-should-put-300-million-into-childcare/>