



March 8, 2023

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Kansas Action for Children  
Opponent Testimony on SB 282  
Senate Committee on Commerce

Chairperson Erickson and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 282, which would remove Kansas Department of Health and Environment authority on child care ratios, staff training, and qualifications by placing them into Kansas law. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive.

Child care is a critical need for families in Kansas. Advocates on both sides of this issue agree that our current system needs significant improvement to support Kansans across the state. While SB 282 attempts to tackle the regulations side of child care and the perceived barriers to increasing child care spots, it does nothing to address the underlying causes of the child care crisis in Kansas.

For instance, the median wage for a child care worker in Kansas is \$10.90 an hour, or less than \$23,000 a year. In an economy where workers are increasingly seeking employment opportunities with high-quality benefits, a living wage, and a culture that implements work-life balance, why would someone choose this low wage? The child care system benefits greatly from passionate workers who are willing to take less than they are worth because of the love they have for their profession. **However, until the compensation system is fixed to reflect a true cost for quality care, demand will continue to exceed capacity.**

In addition to compensation, SB 282 does not elevate how child care providers and early education teachers need quality professional development to ensure they are empowered to provide a robust environment that facilitates brain development. From birth to age five, one million neural connections are formed every second. This rapid expansion and learning take place while the brain is flexible and able to adapt to changes. Child care professionals must have the necessary training to maximize this pivotal time of development.

Whether at home, a child care home setting, or a center, every child in Kansas deserves a place to grow up that facilitates high-quality interactions necessary for healthy brain



development .. This means that all workers in the field need opportunities to learn best practices and develop their professional identity in a way that can benefit all children. **By reducing the number of required training hours from 16 to eight, this bill removes professional standards and demonstrates a disregard for the importance of this early time in a child's life.**

Parents are their child's first teacher and the time they spend together at home is essential to healthy development. However, a majority of Kansas parents do not have the option to stay home with their children full time so they look for the next best thing – a high-quality, nurturing environment where they know their child will be safe. **Child care regulations are about keeping kids safe while they are cared for by others, and staff-to-child ratios are a large part of ensuring that safety.** Looking at our surrounding states, SB 282 would give Kansas the least restrictive ratios. This is not in the best interest for the safety of children and providers.

**Finally, increasing licensed capacity does not correlate to an increase in desired capacity, or the number of children a provider wishes to have in care.** Our statewide licensed capacity is 78,631, but the desired capacity is 67,447, a difference of more than 11,000.<sup>1</sup> Even with these capacities, the number of children enrolled in care is less than 60,000. SB 282 will increase the licensed capacity with a marginal impact on desired capacity. If this bill is passed, there will undoubtedly be a limited number of providers who do increase their ratios, taking in more children. However, parents might not wish to put their children in the more risky environment this would create.

Kansas Action for Children urges the Committee to put the safety of children and providers at the forefront of all decision making. We urge you to not pass this bill out of committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information with you today. Feel free to reach me if you have any questions at [daniel@kac.org](mailto:daniel@kac.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Child Care Aware of Kansas. (Generated March 6, 2023.) *Child Care Aware of Kansas State Point in Time Data.* <https://stage.worklivesystems.com/Kansas?county=all>