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David Jordan, President and CEO
United Methodist Health Ministry Fund
Proponent Testimony for HB 2294
House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Chairman Tarwater and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of HB 2294, which is a bipartisan compromise that unifies Kansas' many early childhood programs and services under the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Access to high-quality child care is necessary for Kansas children and our economy to be able to thrive. It is critically important for working parents of young children to be able to find quality, affordable child care because it aids healthy child development and allows them to return to the workforce.

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a 39-year-old, \$70-million non-partisan health philanthropy based in Hutchinson. Our mission is to improve the health of all Kansans. We focus on three strategic areas: access to care, thriving children, and engaged congregations and communities — a program aimed at addressing community health by engaging churches throughout Kansas.

A key component of our work is helping ensure all Kansas children have the support they need to grow up healthy and equipped for success throughout life. For this reason, we support consolidating early childhood services in the proposed OEC. Ninety percent of brain development occurs before the age of 5, and that is why making the early childhood system more efficient and easier to navigate is crucial to supporting Kansas families. By supporting this proposal, the state of Kansas will speak through action how vitally important it is to maintain families and protect children. These hardworking families, as well as employers, depend on a thriving early childhood system. Eliminating unnecessary government bureaucracy and making it easier for parents and businesses to support our kids isn't a partisan issue; it's a commonsense idea we can all get behind.

We support the bipartisan compromise and the proposed investments in the OEC:

- The OEC will usher in collaboration among organizations responsible for Kansas children and families. With the adoption of this consolidation, red tape will be cut, bureaucracy will function more smoothly, resulting in systemic change that will better serve all those involved. The recommendation to unify early childhood governance derived from a bipartisan task force. Having one agency responsible for early childhood programs would increase accountability and without the need to add or expand programs.
- Consolidation through the OEC would allow families to access information, services and resources more efficiently. This would result in a healthier and safer Kansas. It is our goal to encourage programs that foster improvement in early childhood development and child care, because families thrive when able to access effective resources. This office would minimize difficulties in navigating the system and limit wasted time and effort lost in the current bureaucratic maze.
- This consolidation would give child care providers a better and more effective roadmap in accessing resources they need to serve their communities. Currently, providers are subject to oversight from multiple agencies. Unifying these agencies would streamline the process and create a better result for both providers and families.

We support HB 2294 and hope that you will join us in supporting this important legislation that will improve access to quality early childhood programs in Kansas. Thank you for your consideration.