



February 27, 2025

John Wilson, President and CEO
Kansas Action for Children
Verbal Proponent Testimony on 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 would unify many early childhood programs and services under the Office of Early Childhood, as well as streamline some regulations.

To improve outcomes for Kansas children, we cannot simply focus on the types of programs and services offered and how they're funded. We have to zoom out and explore how the entire early childhood system is governed. Early childhood governance refers to “a state’s organizational structures and its placement of authority and accountability for making program policy, financing, and implementation decisions for publicly funded early care and education for children birth to age 5.”¹

Streamlining the governance of our early childhood system by consolidating many early childhood programs into the Office of Early Childhood is an important solution to the challenges parents and providers face. **High-quality services that are easy for parents to access and providers to navigate will support the healthy development of children.**

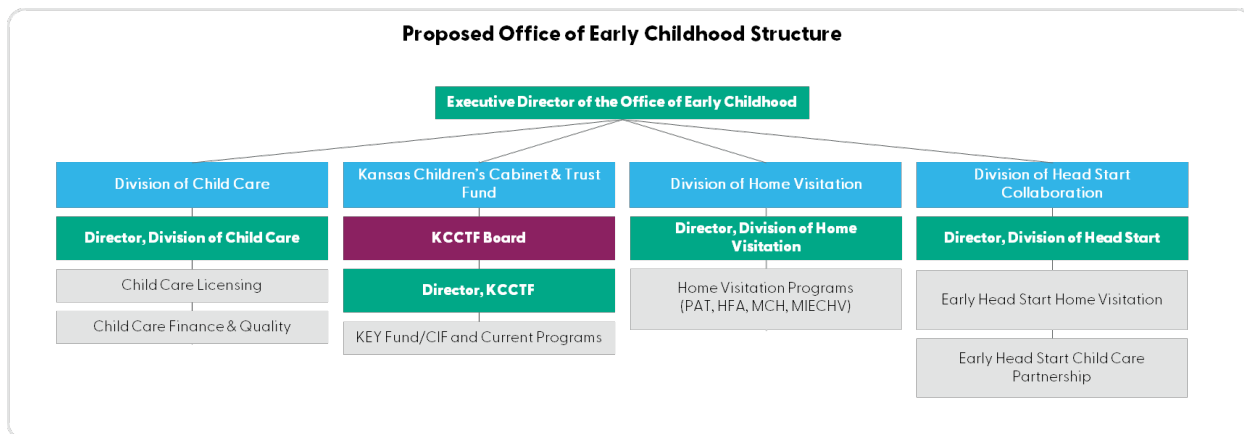
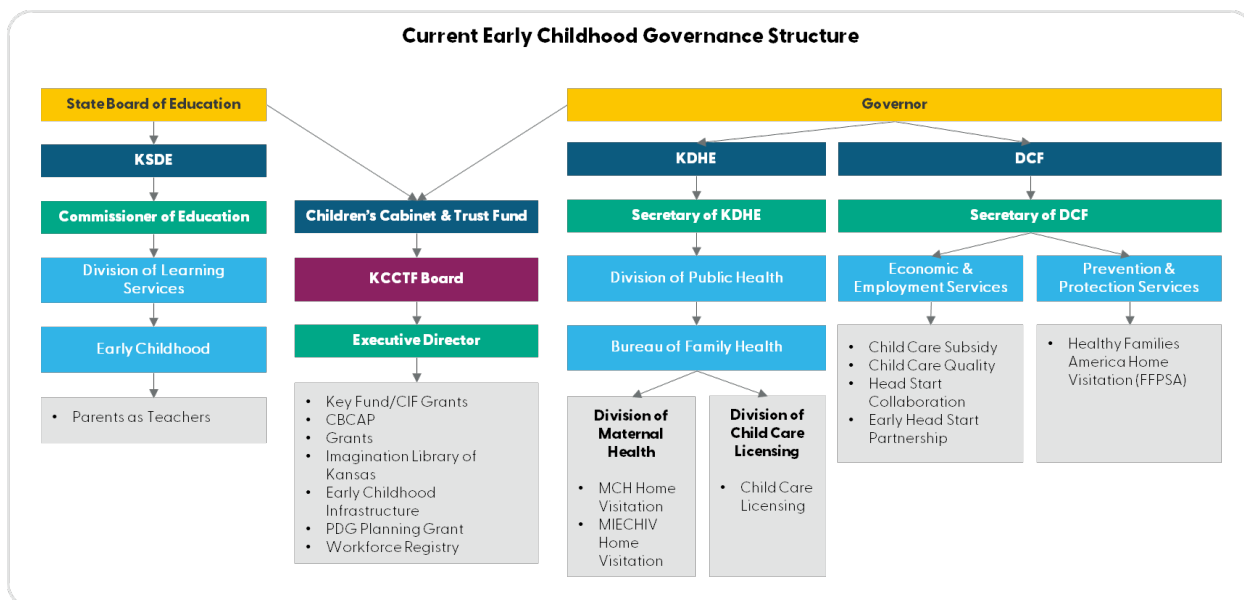
Over the last six years, I’ve witnessed increased collaboration and communication among state agencies that has led to quicker response times to parent and provider challenges, improved service delivery, and systemwide planning. However, the current coordinated model of governance has its limitations. There is a conspicuous lack of authority and accountability for child care and early childhood programs when authority and funding are dispersed across multiple agencies.

As stated in the final report of the Early Childhood Transition Task Force, “an effective model of governance should create coherence, foster accountability and transparency, and improve quality and accessibility.” By that standard, our current structure is not as effective as it could be. In fact, a recent Bipartisan Policy Center report assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of state early childhood systems ranked Kansas 49th in the nation.²

¹ Administration for Children and Families. (June 2021). *Early Childhood Governance*. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdg-b5_governancetoolkit_acc.pdf

² Bipartisan Policy Center. (2023). *Early Childhood: 50 State Report*. https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Bipartisan_Early-Childhood_50-State-Report_KS_2023-2.pdf

Child care providers bear the biggest burden with the current disjointed system. Whether they're starting a new child care business or simply maintaining an existing one, providers are currently subject to oversight from multiple agencies, each with their own policies and practices. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) oversees child care licensing. The Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) administers child care subsidy and quality programs. The Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund offers grants to support early care and education.



A consolidated office would be a convenient “one-stop shop” for providers to get the support and information they need to provide reliable care.

Establishing the Office of Early Childhood will:

- **Increase accountability** to families, providers, and policymakers by having one agency (and leader) administer early childhood programs.

- **Decrease fragmentation** experienced by families and providers by unifying programs and services into one office.
- **Cut burdensome “red tape” and improve efficiency** by reducing the overlapping requirements for providers and better aligning funding.
- **Improve the quality of care and services provided to children** because the staff and programs within the office understand Kansas’ mixed delivery system and can focus exclusively on early childhood issues.

Beyond the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood, HB 2294 would also modernize statutes to reflect effective policies and practices within the early childhood field. The bill would create a surveyor certification program, ensuring better uniformity in how regulatory standards are applied. Additionally, it would eliminate licensing fees for providers, thereby lowering costs for providers.

This bill is the result of multiple rounds of negotiations and compromise, which are necessary to ultimately achieve success. As with any compromise, though, there are issues for which we have reservations.

- **Children’s Cabinet:** Current law provides flexibility in who can be appointed to the Children’s Cabinet by legislative leadership. Under HB 2294, appointments by the Speaker of the House, House Majority Leader, House Minority Leader, Senate President, Senate Majority Leader, and Senate Minority Leader must be elected lawmakers. This change removes flexibility and could politicize the Cabinet. Additionally, the bill alters the terms for legislative appointees and could result in high turnover and the loss of Cabinet knowledge and expertise.
- **Unregulated Child Care:** The definition of “child care facility” on line 26 of page 50 could result in significant expansion of unregulated care and jeopardize the health and safety of children. Should this bill be worked, we strongly encourage the Committee to either reduce the number of hours per week an individual can provide care or decrease the number of children who can be cared for.

Overall, the plan to establish the Office of Early Childhood is well researched and the result of nearly a year’s worth of stakeholder input and bipartisan discussion. It will not solve every challenge experienced by parents, providers, and communities, but it is an important step in building the early childhood system that our kids deserve.

I urge your support of HB 2294 and your continued focus on child care issues in Kansas. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at john@kac.org.

About Kansas Action for Children

Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.