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Paula Neth, President & CEO
The Family Conservancy
Written-Only Proponent Testimony on HB 2294
House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development



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Chairman Tarwater and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2994 on behalf of The Family Conservancy (TFC). I am Paula Neth, President & CEO of TFC – a nonprofit agency helping children take advantage of the most critical period of human development by improving early learning environments and equipping parents and caregivers to make the most of the time they spend with young children. Working hand-in-hand with both families and child care providers gives us a unique perspective on the strengths and challenges facing our early childhood system.

Our current system requires coordination across multiple state agencies, programs, and funding streams. While we've witnessed impressive efforts to stabilize the child care sector – particularly during the pandemic – we've also seen missed opportunities for effective, efficient, real-time responses to the needs of working families and child care providers.

Without access to stable child care, parents oftentimes piece together several different options, which – aside from potential health and safety concerns – does not provide the continuity and structure young children need. This lack of reliable care frequently forces parents, particularly mothers, to leave the workforce or reduce their working hours, further limiting their ability to build and advance their careers. Furthermore, families' earning potential is seriously inhibited without affordable, dependable care. Research estimates the economic impact of insufficient child care on parents, employers, and taxpayers at \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue annually.

To address these challenges, TFC wholeheartedly supports the creation of a unified Office of Early Childhood. Bringing existing programs related to child care, home visiting services, and Head Start together will streamline and improve how we provide services, allowing us to eliminate duplication and inefficiency and increase our accountability to working families, child care providers, employers, and communities across the state.

We would be remiss, however, if we did not take this opportunity to note our concerns regarding other measures included in HB 2294. Specifically, we would draw your attention to the following items and respectfully offer suggestions for changes in line with best practices for the health and safety of young children in early care and education settings:

1. We urge the committee to consider removing current child care licensing regulations from the bill altogether. Codifying current regulations will make it difficult for Kansas' early childhood system to respond quickly to emerging health and safety needs. Regulations are most effective when guided by practitioners in child care and public health with direct input from child care providers, allowing for timely updates based on the latest research and best practices. Placing these rules into law could create unnecessary barriers to maintaining the highest standards of safety and care for young children.

2. We offer the following alternative to the definition of "child care facility" introduced on line 25 of page 50: *"Child care facility" does not include an individual who provides care for less than 26 hours per week to three or fewer children, not more than one of whom may be an infant, who are not related to the individual by blood, marriage or legal adoption.*
3. Currently, Kansas requires 16 hours of professional development training per licensing year. We urge the committee to consider requiring up to 12 hours of professional development training per licensing year with a minimum of 10 hours specified by the secretary. This change will ease the burden on child care providers without sacrificing the training and professional development required to offer safe, high-quality child care.
4. We respectfully request the expansion of eligibility for creation of parent education programs beyond boards, as defined on line 17 of page 68, to include private, nonprofit corporations, associations, or other entities within the state of Kansas.

With the exception of the concerns noted above, we ask that you support the transformative action outlined in HB 2294 and other efforts to increase access to high-quality and affordable child care for all Kansans. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be glad to engage in dialog around this topic (pneth@thefamilyconservancy.org).

Sincerely,



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