



February 26, 2025

Christi Smith, Executive Director, Child Care Aware of Kansas

Verbal Proponent Testimony on HB 2294

House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Chair Rep. Sean Tarwater and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2294. My name is Christi Smith, Executive Director of Child Care Aware of Kansas. We serve as the managing state Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) network, overseeing the effective delivery of services, funding distribution, and performance monitoring for regional CCR&R agencies, which include Child Start, The Family Conservancy, and Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas.

Child Care Aware of Kansas provides comprehensive data analysis on child care supply, demand, cost, and quality to strengthen the capacity of regional CCR&Rs. Additionally, we administer key statewide initiatives, such as consumer education, child care coalitions, grant programs for child care providers, workforce development, and quality improvement efforts.

Beyond our role in system oversight and advocacy, we deliver direct services that make a tangible impact. We assist families in navigating child care options, support child care providers with quality enhancement initiatives such as professional development, coaching, and technical assistance, and engage communities through strategic outreach programs. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, we work to create a more accessible, high-quality child care system that strengthens families and fuels economic growth across Kansas.

A robust child care system benefits everyone—families, early childhood professionals, and local economies. Reliable child care helps parents remain employed, strengthens workforce participation, and stimulates economic growth. Investing in early childhood programs yields long-term social and economic returns by ensuring stable care for young children and keeping families in their communities. Currently, our child care system requires coordination across multiple state agencies.

In 2019, Kansas was awarded an initial Preschool Development Grant (Birth to Five Planning Grant) by the Administration for Children and Families. A key priority identified through this grant was the need for improved collaboration at the community, state, and private sector levels. Stakeholders began working together to streamline the early childhood system, leading to the formalization of the Governance Structure for Early Childhood Services which provides a framework for ongoing collaboration and system improvement. This framework was a great start to pull together community partners. However, opportunities for progress remain. Child Care Aware of Kansas fully supports the creation of the Office of Early Childhood, believing it will strengthen the system by eliminating duplication, enhancing efficiency, and providing a more seamless experience for families and providers. This office will also amplify the strategies outlined in the *All in For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan, advancing the state's commitment to a coordinated and effective early childhood system.



While we fully support the Office of Early Childhood, we want to identify areas in HB 2294 and provide some recommendations that would align with the best practices for health and safety for young children in child care settings.

1. We strongly encourage the committee to remove the existing child care licensing regulations from the bill entirely. Codifying these regulations may hinder Kansas' early childhood system's ability to swiftly address emerging health and safety concerns. Regulations are most effective when shaped by practitioners in child care and public health, with direct input from child care providers, enabling timely updates based on the latest research and best practices.
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.

Child Care Aware of Kansas encourages this committee to advance House Bill 2294, taking a meaningful step toward ensuring child care providers have the resources and support necessary to meet the needs of Kansas families. We appreciate your leadership on this vital issue and stand ready to assist in making high-quality child care more accessible and sustainable across our state. Thank you for your time and consideration and I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christi Smith".

Christi Smith
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