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**DATE: February 27, 2025**  
**TO: House Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Committee**  
**FROM: Jennifer Bruning, Executive Director, Kansas State Alliance of YMCAs**  
**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 2294**

Chairman Tarwater and Honorable Members of the House Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Committee:

My name is Jennifer Bruning, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Kansas State Alliance of YMCAs. I am here on behalf of our YMCA Child Care Task Force to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2294, which would consolidate child care programs and services into the newly created Office of Early Childhood and would remove various barriers limiting child care availability.

The Kansas State Alliance of YMCAs is made up of 10 YMCA associations located in more than 25 communities and hundreds of program sites across the state. As the largest child care provider in Kansas, the Y appreciates this opportunity to discuss the potential impact of this bill on our Y programs, both early learning programs AND school age programs (out-of-school-time, OST).

As background and reference, in 2024, Kansas YMCAs provided child care for:

- 3,788 children in 22 early learning programs (birth – age 5);
- 6,982 youth in 105 before/after school programs (ages 5 – 12); and
- 8,386 kids in 28 summer day and overnight camps (ages 5-17)

At the YMCA, all of our licensed child care programs strive to provide high quality, affordable and accessible child care services to families in communities across Kansas with a mission to serve all regardless of the ability to pay. These programs not only meet the needs of early learners, ensuring they are prepared academically and socially to enter schools, but they make a significant impact on the economy in Kansas as well by supporting workforce development and allowing parents to go to work knowing their kids are in a safe place.

Since Kansas Ys offer both early learning and school age programs, we are touched and impacted by almost all of the child services and programs slated to be consolidated under the proposed Office of Early Childhood. We support the bipartisan effort with this bill to reduce the bureaucratic burden and inefficiencies that arise trying to navigate four different agencies currently responsible for various parts of the child care system. The streamlining of child care and education services into one agency will help our Ys serve more Kansas families and children without facing multiple obstacles.

We also find HB 2294's elimination of the annual state licensing fees for child care facilities and programs to be a value-add to the child care system. It reduces the financial strain our Ys face as they try to balance rising costs with the goal of paying their workers good wages



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and keeping care as affordable as possible for the families we serve. However, while we appreciate all lowering of business costs in this manner, we want to point out that it's the local licensing fees, not the state fees, that make up the bulk of each Y's annual fee budget. These local fees are costly and subject to annual increase by local contracted agencies, adding to our financial burden.

We also support the facility updates and staff qualification changes proposed in the bill, which will help expand our hiring pool while maintaining the Y's high safety standards, and we commend the reduction of professional development training hours, which will allow us to offer more personalized, mission-aligned training that meets the unique needs of staff, programs, and the families we serve.

One important item of note, over the last year and a half our YMCA Child Care Task Force (comprised of all the YMCA child care directors in the state) has worked very collaboratively with KDHE through their comprehensive rules and regulations review process for both early childhood and school age licensees, and we have been extremely pleased how the newly proposed regulations have incorporated many of our language and policy suggestions. As this promulgation process for the school age program regulations is still ongoing, we urge the Committee to ensure that passage of this bill does not stymie or negatively conflict with any of those proposed regulatory improvements.

Finally, our State Alliance of YMCAs would like to express our support for Amendments #1 and #2 being proposed by the Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, which makes clear that school age programs and youth development programs operating in schools already in compliance with the fire safety code do not need additional fire inspections. Over the last several years, our Ys have experienced numerous challenges with the fire safety inspection process imposed by the Kansas Office of the State Fire Marshal's (KSFM) on our school age programs that are hosted within a public or private school building. While recently the new State Fire Marshal and his team have graciously worked with us to implement policy changes that avoid inconsistent code enforcement and duplication of effort on this inspection issue, we feel that putting this policy change into statute will provide better clarity for our child care providers as they maneuver through the annual licensing process and help ensure consistency should there be future personnel changes at KSFM.

YMCAs play a critical role in the Kansas child care system, and as such, we remain committed to staying engaged with both the Administration and the Legislature as this bill moves forward to ensure the creation of the new agency and the proposed licensing, training and facility changes reduce barriers for all Kansas child care providers.

We urge your support of House Bill 2294 with the proposed amendments mentioned above. Thank you for your consideration.