



# ***ZERO TO THRIVE***

Kansas Child Care & Early Development Coalition



February 27, 2025

Logan Stenseng, Policy Coordinator

Thrive Allen County/Thrive Kansas

Written-Only Neutral 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 neutral testimony in support of HB 2294. I work for Thrive Kansas, and co-lead our Zero to Thrive Early Childhood & Child Care Coalition efforts. We have traveled the state the past 4 years, connecting with families and providers of all kinds, urban and rural, with one mission: find and advocate for policy solutions that meet the needs of community members and stakeholders in Kansas early childhood. We assisted in circulating a statewide sign-on support last session that was signed by over 700 Kansas organizations and individuals- ranging from early childhood educators, businesses, urban and rural economic development organizations, health organizations, and many others from across our state in support of last year's legislation HB 2785 and the Office of Early Childhood.

At one of our rural child success road trip events in 2022, I met with a provider in Canton, Kansas. As we talked she mentioned that food costs had been especially high for her program and it was a considerable financial stressor for her center. I asked if she had heard of the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CAFCP), and she said she had heard of it but had never been connected to it- her main connections were with KDHE through her local surveyor and the fire marshal. They had not worked with DCF because dealing with KDHE was enough hassle for their program, and working with DCF to jump through additional hoops and new bureaucrats was another challenge. As an outside party whose main focus is finding any and all ways to connect this child care provider to resources to help them remain afloat and thrive, I made the connection with their program and CACFP and tried to dispel some of their concerns about working with the DCF child care assistance program. It shouldn't take an outside, random

person to make those connections to support a vital, rural child care program. Delays and hurdles in an overall fragmented system of early childhood support have been a burden to our locals for years.

Navigating numerous government bureaucracies, with different missions and personnel that are disconnected, is massively frustrating for our local early childhood educators, economic leaders, and working families- which then creates a headache for businesses who rely on all of them. For our rural communities facing decline, critical resources and infrastructure are essential to bringing and keeping families and businesses in our communities. Saving our small and large businesses' lost revenue due to the ever-expanding costs of the child care crisis in Kansas should be a priority- especially when it's a cost-effective, and common-sense solution like forming the Kansas Office of Early Childhood. We need to maximize the effectiveness and coordination among our services designed to support young working families and the child care programs that businesses depend on.

There are parts of HB 2294, the Bipartisan Early Childhood Proposal, that aim to consolidate and streamline our early childhood programs similarly to last year's legislation- which is widely supported and popular. However, the inclusion of additional policies that impact training requirements, child ratios, and other child care policies have garnered backlash from the field of licensed child care providers and should be reconsidered. Legislators should connect with the field of early childhood professionals and leaders in their district to learn the policy impacts before they make consequential policy changes. **Notably, the policies we've heard the most negative feedback are:**

- **Reducing the number of annual training hours for child care providers to 10 hours instead of 16.**
- **Allowing providers to care for 4 or more infants if they take additional training**
- **Expanding the scope of unlicensed and unaccountable child care via the new exemption for up to 35 hours per week.**

There are positive policy additions like enabling providers to have home child care they aren't required to reside in, and establishing some regulatory flexibility within the pilot program that can help start-up child care programs get operational- in areas of need like rural Kansas- while being supported to maintain health and safety baselines for children. The field of child care and early childhood education consists of dedicated public servants in every community- from licensed home providers to faith-based providers to centers- who deserve a seat at the table when policy is being drafted on the subject. These leaders have prioritized the pursuit of excellent care and safety of Kansas children for often their entire working lives, and the lack of considering their perspectives when drafting these policies sends the dangerous message that the importance of childcare, the professionalism within the industry, and the necessary safety measures are not valued.

Early childhood must be protected, prioritized, and its systems should work in tandem with one another to make the most efficient use of our taxpayer dollars. It is for this reason we support the aspects of HB 2294 that consolidate services into the Kansas Office of Early Childhood. However, we withhold our support for the entire legislation until the issues above are addressed alongside the majority of Kansas child care providers- or simply remove them and pass a clean Office of Early Childhood streamlined package that has wide support across Kansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony, if you have any questions you can reach me at [logan@thriveallencounty.org](mailto:logan@thriveallencounty.org)

Sincerely,

Logan Stenseng, Policy Coordinator