



To: Rep. Sean Tarwater and Members of the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development
From: Kevin Walker, Executive Vice President and Chief Policy Officer
Overland Park Chamber of Commerce
Date: 27 February 2025
Subject: Proponent Testimony, HB 2294

Rep. Tarwater and committee members, I am Kevin Walker, Executive Vice President and Chief Policy Officer for the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce. I am pleased to submit testimony in support of HB 2294, a bill that creates the Office of Early Childhood and enacts much-needed system improvements.

Human resources professionals frequently cite access to childcare as a major barrier to recruiting and retaining employees. This concern is backed up by data. In Johnson County, ChildCare Aware of Kansas indicates that we are currently only meeting about 55% of the capacity needed to satisfy the demand. Lack of available childcare impedes employment and impacts our employers' ability to reach their full operational potential.

While the focus is often on challenges facing today's workforce, lack of quality and affordable care will also impact tomorrow's workforce. The first five years of a child's life are critical to long-term success. It is imperative that we have an early childhood system in Kansas that supports this critical developmental period in a child's life.

HB 2294 builds on a solid foundation that already exists in Kansas. The legislation takes what we have and makes it better through improved efficiencies, benefitting providers, children, families, and businesses across the state. It is important to note that the bill streamlines what we currently have in place rather than creating new programs or expanding government.

As you would expect, it is hard to find universal support for any legislation making its way through the process. I know there are reservations about the definition of “child care facility” in the bill. I would ask that you hear the concerns of providers who fear an expansion of unregulated care because of that definition.

The safety of our youngest residents is a top priority for everyone involved in the childcare system – from providers to regulators – and any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children should be fully addressed.

Overall, HB 2294 is a positive step forward for Kansas, and I ask that you act favorably on the legislation.