

January 29th 2025

Dallas Gosselin, Norton County Economic Development
dallas@nortoncountyks.gov

Written Only Public Comment on KSDE Budget
House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Dear Chair Goetz and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Dallas Gosselin, I am the executive director for Norton County Economic Development. We're located in the Northwest Corner of the State, bordering Nebraska. Our organization has been diligently working towards childcare solutions, but we've faced continual issues with the ability to stack capital. Ultimately, childcare operations don't net enough income to qualify for loans while also making the rest of their budget balanced. As we know, childcare suffers from a wicked dichotomy, a high cost of service for the parents and low profitability for the providers.

When our childcare coalition first began in early 2023, we assumed we could spur local mothers to start in-home daycares. We quickly learned that this wouldn't be our solution, as the interest just was not there. Oddly enough, folks really don't like to have their business out of their house. Our group conducted interviews with local providers seeking to expand capacity... That unfortunately can't easily happen due to regulation and square footage requirements.

To expand our ideas, we recently conducted a series of county-wide meetings, in which we released a survey that received almost 200 responses. Every respondent agreed that childcare availability is a problem in Norton County. We have a serious problem that impedes our future growth. Without additional grant funding programs designed for non-profit childcare operations, the future growth of childcare operations is at serious risk.

We are currently in partnership with a local business, a local childcare center, and several community partners to find a viable solution for childcare capacity increase. With a \$600,000 local donation, hopeful to be paid with additional grant funding, we believe that properly funding the Childcare Capacity Accelerator Grants would be the final step in seeing real value being added to these communities. As childcare is difficult to iron out, funding is becoming more and more difficult to find, and the timeline of establishing a thoughtful, impactful plan, continued funding is paramount to the long-term success of growth in Kansas. Without meaningful facilities to support having a child, we will continue a concerning trend on birth statistics. Kansas has a chance to welcome in a new generation of "baby boomers" by supporting a strong childcare system throughout the state.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to testify on the KSDE budget and Children's Cabinet recommendations. Please reach out with any questions at dallas@nortoncountyks.gov

Sincerely,

Dallas D. Gosselin

Executive Director

Norton City/County Economic Development