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Proponent, written testimony in support of HB 2785
House Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development Committee
March 6, 2024

Chair Tarwater, Vice Chair Borjon, Ranking Member Probst, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony supporting HB 2785 which will transfer most child care programs to the Kansas Office of Early Childhood. The Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics and its 450 pediatrician and pediatric resident members support passage of HB 2785.

Speaking on behalf of my fellow pediatricians, I cannot emphasize enough the critical role that early childhood development plays in shaping a child's future. The first few years of a child's life are a period of remarkable growth - physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Early childhood experiences lay the foundation for a lifetime of learning, health, and well-being.

Currently, early childhood programs in Kansas are housed in multiple state agencies. Parents may have difficulty finding the service(s) that would best suit their child, as they may not know where to look. For example, do they contact KDHE, DCF, or the Children's Cabinet for help locating affordable early childcare? Pediatricians and other stakeholders that refer families to these programs face a similar challenge. This bill proposes to consolidate most early childhood programs within one agency. The benefits from breaking down current siloes include better collaboration among all early childhood programs, reduced duplicative services, and increased efficiency. Housing the programs within a centralized agency will also provide easier, user-friendly for parents and stakeholders, like me.

From a medical perspective, we know interventions and supportive environments during early childhood play a pivotal role in promoting optimal brain development, impacting a child's physical, mental, and social health. These programs provide a stimulating and enriching environment for exposing children to various sensory experiences. They emphasize language development and building a diverse vocabulary. They help children learn to regulate their emotions, develop empathy, and build a foundation for healthy social interactions. And they develop cognitive skills, like memory, attention, and problem-solving.

Home visiting programs are linked to the healthcare pediatricians provide. These programs incorporate screening for developmental delays and identify when additional interventions are needed. They provide personalized support to families, with trained professionals offering guidance on parenting, early childhood development, and accessing essential resources. These programs help create a solid foundation for positive parent-child relationships, promote healthy attachments, and address developmental concerns early on.

The benefits of early childhood programs extend beyond individual children and families. A well supported and cohesive early childhood system positively impacts the community and the economy at large. We urge you to support the successful passage of HB 2785. It will increase family and stakeholder awareness of the various programs, helping them to better access them. And it will use public resources wisely through better coordination and reducing duplicative services.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We remain available as a resource and partner for all matters affecting children's health and wellbeing.

Respectfully submitted,
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Chair, Public Policy Committee
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