

March 6, 2024

Nick Engels, Owner
Littles Early Learning
Written-Only Proponent Testimony for HB 2785
House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Chairman Tarwater and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am Nick Engels, a small business owner in Butler County. Through our property management business, a background in education, and as a husband and father of seven children, my wife and I found ourselves with an opportunity to start a child care business about five years ago. We currently own a freestanding center in Benton (just east of Wichita), and we own and operate nine programs in schools through a partnership with Circle Public Schools. We recently purchased a center in Augusta that we are remodeling and hope to open sometime this fall. Because of the demand for our center in Benton and receiving a portion of grant dollars through the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund Accelerator grant, we are adding two classrooms to our center for 18 infant slots. Construction begins this month with the classrooms opening in the fall. We are already full with a wait list. We are excited to serve our area of the state (and maybe eventually statewide) with child care opportunities for families in Kansas communities.

One of our frustrations with the child care industry is the licensing process. I am a proponent of the Governor's plan to consolidate services into an Office of Early Childhood. Streamlining the licensure process and having one agency to go to for our needs would be a huge step forward. We discovered glaring inefficiency in working with multiple state offices in KDHE and Kansas State Fire Marshal. The inefficiencies delayed our construction progress and the opening of our programs. You've heard the saying that "Time is money." These delays have cost us, and I would dare to say if I put pen to paper, substantially cost us.

Thank you for your consideration and support of early childhood education and care in Kansas. We've all seen the research and understand its importance in our communities. I believe firmly that the best educators of our children are their parents, however the ability to live on a single income is not an option for many families. Thus, our community and in turn our economy is dependent on child care options for our Kansas families. My ask is that you continue to explore ideas to assist in funding child care opportunities in Kansas, as well as making the services that already exist more efficient and easier to navigate for Kansans like myself- a great step in that direction would be the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood. Please reach out to me if you have any questions about my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nick Engels". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and address.

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