



To: Chairwoman Erickson and Members of the Senate Commerce Committee

From: David Jordan, President and CEO, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

Date: March 8th, 2023

RE: Senate Bill 282

Chairwoman Erickson and Members of the Senate Commerce Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment in opposition to Senate Bill 282.

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a 37-year-old, \$60-million health philanthropy located in Hutchinson. Our mission is to improve the health of Kansans. We focus on three strategic areas—access to care, Thriving Children, and Engaged Congregations and Communities, a program aimed at addressing community health by engaging churches throughout Kansas.

A key component of our work is supporting all Kansans to ensure they have the opportunity to thrive. As a foundation that supports all Kansas kids having the opportunity to benefit from the high-quality early learning experiences needed to support healthy brain development, we appreciate the sponsors' commitment to this issue and the Committee's willingness to address the lack of quality, affordable child care in Kansas.

While we agree that there is a need to look at child care regulations, we are concerned this legislation poses a significant threat to the health and safety of young children while in child care. Recognizing that 90% of brain development happens by the age of five, we are concerned that this legislation focuses on removing supports for children rather than bolstering the early education experience. Below are our concerns.

Child care regulations keep Kansas kids and providers safe. By reducing child care staff training requirements, this legislation is harmful to Kansas children and providers, and jeopardizes their health and safety. Having properly trained and licensed child care staff is essential to keeping Kansas children safe by ensuring providers can effectively help all children in their care in case of emergency. Similarly, reducing age requirements for child care providers could put kids at risk.

Funding will be at risk. Components in this legislation will put Kansas out of compliance with federal requirements, putting funding at risk.

Poorly crafted and unnecessary legislation. This legislation is unnecessary and not being requested by the child care community or child care advocates. Many components of the bill are redundant and duplicate existing statutory requirements. Language in the bill circumvents existing law established by the Kansas Legislature.

Increasing licensee capacity will not necessarily correspond to an increase in available child care slots. Many providers may not choose to increase their "desired capacity," which is the number of children a provider wishes to have in their care. More must be done to get additional workers into the child care field so the number of child care slots are increased, rather than relying on already-overworked providers to take more children into their care.

Kansas has more family child care programs (3,247) than centers (660)¹, many of whom operate as sole caregivers. Child care is a challenging business with long hours and low pay. **Asking child care providers to care for additional children (and reducing their required hours for training and preparation) with no additional support misplaces the burden of solving our child care challenges and has the potential to put our most vulnerable Kansans in danger.**

This legislation poses a significant threat to the health and safety of young children while in child care. Relying on child care staff to care for more children with less training and preparation sets Kansas back significantly in terms of safety and quality of available child care.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. We look forward to partnering with the legislative sponsors and Committee on future efforts to strengthen the early childhood system in Kansas. Please be in touch if we can be of assistance.

¹ Kansas State Point In Time Child Care Data, Child Care Aware of Kansas, retrieved 3/3/23