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February 23, 2023

Paula Neth, President & CEO
The Family Conservancy
Written-only testimony in support of SB 164
Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation

Dear Members of the Committee on Assessment and Taxation,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB 164 on behalf of The Family Conservancy (TFC). At TFC, we help children take advantage of the most important period of human development by improving early learning environments, building resilience and empowering families.

Much of our work involves partnering with early care and education providers to improve the quality and accessibility of child care in our community. In Wyandotte and Johnson counties, where we do much of our work, there is currently capacity to meet less than 50 percent of the demand according to data from Child Care Aware of Kansas. There are a number of factors contributing to this issue, but one of the most pressing issues is a significant shortage of child care workers.

Almost every child care center in our community is operating in limited capacity because they cannot find and retain staff. As wages have risen in fields like fast food and warehouse work, child care has been unable to keep up. The average annual income for child care workers in Kansas is \$23,440 according to Child Care Aware of Kansas. In many cases, tuition rates already exceed what families can afford — forcing providers to walk a fine line between keeping rates affordable and paying their workers a fair wage.

While the cost of child care is high, I assure you nobody is getting rich in this system. It is a labor-intensive and costly service to provide, even in the most basic sense. Further, as the pandemic-related funding that has been keeping the sector afloat expires, things stand to get much worse.

In Wyandotte County, we have been administering annual salary supplements to teachers at a select group of centers for more than three years. At our most recent disbursement the average supplement was \$709, and the year-over-year retention rate was 86 percent. This rate is a vast improvement from the estimated 25 to 40 percent retention rate without the supplement.

Please support SB 164. While this is far from a solution to the child care crisis we're experiencing, it addresses one of the most urgent needs by incentivizing child care professionals to remain in the sector while we work toward long-term solutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be glad to engage in dialog around this topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paula Neth".

Paula Neth
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