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March 6, 2023

Paula Neth, President & CEO
The Family Conservancy
Written-only testimony in opposition of SB 282
Senate Commerce Committee

Dear Members of the Senate Commerce Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 282 on behalf of The Family Conservancy (TFC). My name is Paula Neth, President & CEO of TFC. At TFC, we help children take advantage of the most important period of human development by improving early learning environments and equipping parents and caregivers to make the most of the time they spend with young children.

At a time when both the supply and demand sides of the child care sector are facing significant challenges, we appreciate the intent of SB 282, to improve access to early care and education programs. We share this goal.

However, while SB 282 is well-intentioned, we do not believe it will have the desired results of improving access to child care. Furthermore, increasing licensed capacities and easing caregiver qualifications may jeopardize the safety of Kansas children.

We are also concerned that the proposition of putting child care regulations in statute will hinder the agility of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to adapt and evolve to changing dynamics in the Kansas child care system.

At TFC, we have found proven ways to improve access while increasing the quality of our early care and education system. Beginning in 2018, with funding from the state of Kansas, TFC launched the Start Young program which bridges many of the shortcomings in the child care system. Since 2018, the program has helped bring 346 new child care spaces to Wyandotte County, and sustained them through scholarships, material/furnishing grants, and salary supplements and education scholarships for teachers, and assisting families in accessing the state child care subsidy. Start Young also focuses on improving the quality of existing programs by providing free professional development and coaching to teachers and administrators.

We urge our legislators, instead of permanently removing safeguards meant to protect the safety and wellbeing of children, to instead support expansion of innovative solutions, as was done with the funding of Start Young.

Early care and education is a critical piece of our community's infrastructure. It's not just about meeting the immediate workforce needs, but preparing the next generation to lead Kansas into the next chapter of success. This sector does not need deregulation, it needs long-term investments so we can begin to take advantage of the amazing opportunity it offers.

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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