

Proponent Testimony on HB 2294
House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development
Thursday, February 27, 2025
Janet Stanek, Secretary
Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Chairman Tarwater and members of the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2294. This bill unifies the State's early childhood care and education programs into the Kansas Office of Early Childhood. At the heart of this bill is the desire to support Kansas early childhood care and education professionals, as well as the young children and families of Kansas.

HB 2294 is based on the recommendation of the 2024 Early Childhood Transition Task Force, which was made up of bipartisan elected officials, early childhood care and education professionals and state agency leaders, who met with citizens across the state, gathered feedback from external partners and collected information from state agency professionals regarding their early childhood programs. These explorations allowed the Task Force to gauge early childhood care and education needs in Kansas. Through this process it became clear that the current system in Kansas contributes to confusion for service providers and families attempting to access resources for their young children. This leads to programmatic inefficiencies and constrains state and local leaders from addressing these issues. The first step to a solution is the Office of Early Childhood. When passed, HB 2294 will move Kansas Department of Health and Environment's (KDHE) child care licensing (CCL) and home visiting programs into the Office of Early Childhood.

Child care licensing (CCL) is responsible for establishing and enforcing regulatory safeguards for approximately 5,000 facilities in Kansas while also processing applications and issuing licenses to those approved. To do so, CCL employs staff across the state and manages several contracts with local county health departments. CCL is primarily funded by passthrough funds specified via an interagency agreement between KDHE and Department for Children and Families (DCF), the lead agency. KDHE CCL carries out the health

and safety portion of the state's early childhood care plan on behalf of DCF. KDHE also represents the state lead for the early childhood workforce. Although KDHE CCL has made vast improvements in previous years, we acknowledge that the current system often leads to frustration for those attempting to navigate it. Parents, providers, elected officials and others are often unsure of who or where to go to meet their child care questions and needs.

Home visiting is a voluntary program meant to connect families to services for prenatal to age five in their community through in-home visits from a family support professional. Goals of home visiting are to support expecting parents, increase parenting knowledge, support healthy child development and families and support school readiness. Currently, Kansas home visiting spans multiple state agencies, is financed through numerous funding streams and comes in the form of at least seven different program models. KDHE specifically funds Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) and Universal Home Visiting (UHV) through Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programs across the state. The work of the task force revealed a need for increased focus on program alignment and unification of services in home visiting.

This unification of authority to oversee state early childhood care and education programs will improve the process of policy making, streamline funding opportunities, reduce red tape for stakeholders and align efforts to improve outcomes. KDHE supports the passage of HB 2294 to ease administrative burden, facilitate access to services across the state and improve the delivery and efficiency of early childhood care and education programs. This change will help address gaps and overlaps in our current system and more effectively support Kansas children and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to support passage of HB 2294. We welcome any questions at the appropriate time.