



February 27, 2025

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce and our 1,300 members representing all sectors of business and industry in Kansas, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 2294, AN ACT concerning child care; relating to licensure of day care facilities, child care homes and child care centers; reducing license fees and training requirements; creating a process for day care facility licensees to apply for a temporary waiver of certain statutory requirements; authorizing the secretary of health and environment to develop and operate pilot programs to increase child care facility availability and capacity; establishing the Kansas office of early childhood; transferring administration of day care licensing, parent education programs and the child care subsidy program to the Kansas office of early childhood; creating the day care facilities and child care resource and referral agencies licensing fee fund and the day care criminal background and fingerprinting fund; defining youth development programs.

H.B. 2294 would establish the Kansas Office of Early Childhood within the Executive Branch, administered under the direction and supervision of the Executive Director of Early Childhood. The Director would be appointed by the Governor, subject to confirmation by the Senate. Existing early childhood programs currently housed within the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) and Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) would be transferred to the new agency. This agency would include the Division of Child Care, the Division of Home Visitation, the Division of Head Start Collaboration, and the Kansas Children's Cabinet. The bill would update all relevant statutory references to the office and director. The Office would also be required to facilitate and coordinate interagency cooperation to serve children and families through a variety of state agencies. All duties, responsibilities, requirements, and powers of the agency and the Director would be detailed in the bill, and new funds would be created for agency operations. An interagency transition team would be appointed by the Governor on or after July 1, 2025, with the full transition to the consolidated agency to be completed by July 1, 2026.

In addition to establishing the Office, H.B. 2294 would include extensive amendments to current childcare statutes. The bill would amend requirements for childcare homes and centers, including changes to staff and provider qualifications and training, licensing and data system requirements, and facility standards. It would eliminate annual license fees for operating a childcare facility. The development and operation of pilot programs designed to increase the availability or capacity of childcare facilities in the state would be authorized by the Secretary of Health and Environment and, after July 1, 2026, by the Director of the Office of Early Childhood.



Access to childcare and the availability of affordable options has become a major issue for the business community. Put simply, educated, trained, and work-ready Kansans cannot fully enter the workforce if they have children and either cannot find or cannot afford childcare. Kansas government has invested billions of dollars in its education systems—from K–12 to higher education, junior colleges, and technical training programs. These sizeable investments become stranded capital for the state when citizens who have received that education and training are unable to participate fully in Kansas’s economy.

While Kansas commerce and industry needs workers—a focus that should be paramount for state government—the state also should promote policies that afford every member of our society the opportunity to achieve success, happiness, and wealth. A job is foundational to these pursuits. Without adequate income, housing is hard to attain, food is difficult to put on the table, bills are hard to pay, and it is nearly impossible to save for the future success of one’s children. For far too many Kansans, access to affordable childcare is the final hurdle on the path to achieving the American dream. It is not government’s job to guarantee success, but it is government’s job to remove unnecessary barriers it has erected.

The Chamber supports H.B. 2294 because it would benefit job creators while also helping everyday Kansans. Consolidating decision-making into one office will reduce bureaucracy and the confusion it creates, making it easier for those willing to take risks to open a business that provides childcare. The reduction of onerous rules and regulations will simplify operations for small business owners and lower compliance costs, thereby increasing options and market competition for childcare.

For these reasons, the Chamber urges the Committee to report H.B. 2294 favorably for passage.

Thank you, and I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Very truly yours,

Jason P. Watkins

Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce