

February 15, 2017

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 126
Kansas Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Dear Chair Schmidt and Members of the Committee:

I am a parent who resides in Johnson County. My husband and I have two beautiful school age children at home who are the delight of our lives. We treasure our time with them as we guide and witness their growth into compassionate, civil-minded, little people who have much to contribute to society. Like many parents, we both work jobs outside of the home and rely on a 'village' to care for and teach our children when we cannot directly be by their side.

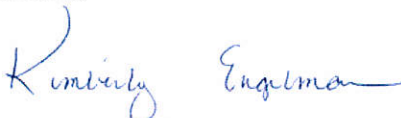
While we have lived in Johnson County since 1995, we do not have family nearby to help with child care. As such, we have paid for child care professionals to care for our children, keep them safe, and help them to thrive. Our school age children, however, have never seen the inside of a Kansas family child care home or child care center. You see, in 2004, the Kansas child care system and a licensed family child care home provider in Mission, KS severely let our family down when our firstborn daughter, Lexie, perished as a result of a preventable injury she received during her 3rd day of out of home child care. Lexie was 13 months old when she died and she took pieces of our hearts with her. Her death was entirely preventable and should not have happened. As we are with Lexie's two younger siblings whom she has never met, we should be enjoying having a 13 year old Lexie with us, eagerly anticipating her entry into Blue Valley West high school, having her alongside us as we volunteer in our church youth ministry, watching her as she excels in a sport of her choice (her younger sister loves soccer and her Sporting Blue Valley team, I wonder if Lexie would too), enjoying the music she makes as part of a school band or choir, playing with and forging a way for her younger brother and sister, and joining us as we help to put on family friendly community events through our family owned business.

The Kansas Child Care System journey received a huge boost when Lexie's Law was passed in 2010. So many advancements were made that propelled our state from "worst to first", practically speaking. The provisions in Lexie's Law are critical to uphold and more is left to be done for the benefit of children and families across Kansas.

SB 126 continues the beneficial advancement of child care oversight in Kansas and puts the state in alignment with new 2014 federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) requirements for child care provider background checks. The new required background check procedures will provide parents with piece of mind that anyone with contact with their child in a licensed or exempt child care setting is carefully vetted not just in our great state of Kansas but nationwide as well. This is so important, especially since our largest state metropolitan area straddles the KS/MO state line, making it relatively easy for a child care provider who has been placed on the child abuse and neglect/prohibited provider registry or who has been shut down by child care licensing to move a few miles away across the state line and re-open a child care facility/home.

To put it lightly, SB 126 is a no brainer from the parent point of view as are many other oversight protections that child care regulations provide. There is an army of concerned parents and families from across the state who are very interested in ensuring safe, healthy early learning environments are available to young children as families work. Evidence of this are the more than 300 sign ons to a letter from parents and family members to Secretary Mosier at KDHE in support of enhanced child care provider professional development requirements. I hope that you will support SB 126 and help move it along through this legislative session in swift manner. No matter your political viewpoint, safe child care is something that we all can get around and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kimberly Engelma". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kim Engelman, PhD (Lexie's Mom)
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