Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 2785
March 6, 2024
House Commerce, Labor, & Economic Development Committee
Submitted by Renee Duxler, President/CEO

Several weeks ago, I was fortunate enough to give this committee a brief report on the economic development and growth that Salina has been experiencing over the last few years. We have had over 800 jobs added in the last five years and continue to see anywhere from 2,000 to 2,300 jobs posted in any given month for Saline County. And like many other Kansas communities, I indicated that both housing and childcare were two of our largest challenges in workforce recruitment and retention for the area.

We have strong local leadership that has made significant progress in addressing childcare capacity here, with almost $3 million now raised by the Salina Area United Way's Early Childcare Initiative Fund. This initiative is being driven predominantly by our major employers—including Great Plains Manufacturing and Salina Regional Healthcare Center-- who understand the critical role of quality early childhood infrastructure for both current and future workforce development.

The Salina Area Chamber of Commerce and our local employers support HB 2785 in its effort to consolidate governance and address specific failures in the current system to include difficulty for families navigating the system and overlapping requirements on providers. There is also a benefit to the increased accountability for one agency to be responsible for early childhood programs.

This bill will assist in supporting community efforts like ours by filling gaps in early childhood programming at the state level and by unifying governance without increasing FTEs to a more effective structure to serve Kansans. We feel strongly that the state's current system constrains both state and local leaders from solving the most pressing problems that prevent families from finding the services they need, and a consolidation of these programs only serves to strengthen our local efforts.

Thank you for your time.