

March 6, 2023  
Senate Committee on Commerce

Chairperson Renee Erickson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony regarding **SB 282**. I am providing written comments in opposition for this bill.

This bill will not solve the many problems that our early childhood programs and families are currently facing, but will create harmful safety issues for our youngest citizens and potentially cause more educators to leave the field completely.

Lowering the age requirement for those educating children birth to five, the most critical years for brain development, requiring less training for educators, and increasing child:adult ratios is detrimental to our field.

I owned Manchester School for Young Children, a private childcare center for nine years in Topeka, KS. I was forced to close that center in February 2022, due to lack of finding qualified educators to teach our students. Since closing, I have continued to work in the early childhood field as an early childhood special education teacher with children birth to age three. With this position, I work with the children on my caseload in their homes and their early childhood centers and home childcare facilities throughout Shawnee County. I see the same problem everywhere. Lack of workforce causing classrooms to be closed, new staff hired with little to no experience and over-worked and underpaid educators working without health insurance or retirement plans, often struggling to pay their own bills.

Low professional pay, lack of benefits, and limited support in the classroom leads to high turnover in the workforce and in turns results in unqualified staff working with our most critical age group of children. This leads to greater scarcity of available slots for children in our communities and lower-quality early childhood programs. This causes disruptive experience for families and children at the exact time in their lives that their development thrives on consistency.

Our educators and parents are seeing a dramatic increase in behavioral issues and social emotional delays and are without the tools or training to appropriately meet the needs of these children and their families. We cannot simply lower training requirements, increase the number of students in each classroom or lower the age of hired educators to increase availability. This will create more workforce issues in early childhood.

KDHE childcare regulations are put in place to keep children safe while they are in a providers care. I don't think anyone wants to sacrifice the safety of our Kansas children or put educators, directors, or owners in a position that they cannot provide developmentally appropriate environments to **all** children in their care.

Thank you to the Committee for taking the time to read my testimony in opposition of SB 282. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can answer any questions or provide additional information to the Committee on this matter.

Respectfully,

Christina Turner-Early childhood teacher, Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children Vice-President, advocate, and previous Shawnee County childcare center owner