



**HB 2371 TESTIMONY
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND SENIORS
LONA DUVALL, PRESIDENT/ CEO
FINNEY COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
February 18, 2021**

Chair Concannon and Members of the House Committee on Children and Seniors,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 2371 relating to eligibility for public benefits; removing cooperation with child support from eligibility requirements for food and child care assistance; exempting adults enrolled in school from the 20-hour-per-week work requirement; amending K.S.A. 2020 Supp. 39-709 and repealing the existing section.

Finney County Economic Development Corporation has worked diligently over the past several years to create a sustainable, replicable childcare and early learning solution for our community. We have recently begun offering the results of our research and planning to other communities so they too can have a framework to plan for their unique childcare needs.

We learned many things about the importance of high quality, licensed childcare and early learning opportunities during this planning and judge this need to be the most pressing of all challenges facing every community in Kansas. While AVAILABILITY of care is a key component of our planning, we recognize that ACCESSIBILITY of care is equally important. Removing barriers from access to high quality, licensed childcare and early learning programming is an important step toward ensuring we can meet the childcare needs of today's workforce while simultaneously investing in the workforce of tomorrow by creating learning opportunities for our youngest residents during the time they are most likely to carry the benefits of said education for a lifetime.

There are many reasons why custodial parents may not be in a position to demand child support. Abusive situations are very prevalent in our communities and, while we support holding these individuals accountable for meeting the needs of their biological children, we cannot in good conscience allow the children in these situations to be punished as a result of the actions of one of their parents. We further believe it will cost our communities more in future expenses resulting from not investing in learning opportunities for our young. As Frederick Douglas said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." Investing in these children now will undoubtedly save us countless dollars in special education costs, increased healthcare, and corrections costs in the future.

We urge you to approve this Bill and we thank you for assisting our communities as we strive to grow and sustain childcare and early learning opportunities.

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