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DATE: January 31, 2022
TO: House Children & Seniors Committee
FROM: Andrea Eliot, Greater Wichita Y Child Care & Branch Director, obo KS State Alliance of YMCAs
RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 2525

Madam Chair and Honorable Members of the House Children & Seniors Committee:

Hello and good afternoon. My name is Andrea Eliot, and I am the Branch Director for Child Care and Camp with the Greater Wichita YMCA. I am here today to provide testimony in support of HB 2525 on behalf of the Kansas Alliance of YMCAs Child Care Task Force. Our State Alliance is made up of 11 Y associations in more than 27 communities across the state. As the largest child care provider in the state (we serve 1 out of every 4 KS kids), the Y appreciates this opportunity to support a measure that would expand child care assistance eligibility.

All of our child care programs strive to provide high quality, affordable and accessible child care services to families in communities across Kansas with a mission to serve all regardless of the ability to pay. These programs not only meet the needs of early learners, ensuring they are prepared academically and socially to enter schools, but they make a significant impact on the economy in Kansas as well.

In our experience, parents want to work – they want to be self-sufficient. I think we can all agree that the cost of child care can be a barrier for a parent. The child care assistance program is key in helping low income families afford child care services, which in turn allows them to work and gain both skills to further their careers and increase their income potential.

House Bill 2525 would expand child care assistance and fix a faulty work requirement, which as it is currently written, does not support many of our Y families who want to take steps to further their opportunities and income potential through training programs and continuing education. One such example would be a single mom with a young toddler in our Wichita YMCA Early Learning Center.

“Imagine a parent coming in excited to share how their boss had just offered them the opportunity to train for a new position, one that could increase her pay and potential for future advancement. It comes with a small pay increase now, and she is feeling successful and sees a brighter future ahead for her and her child. Then imagine a few days later after the parent has provided these work updates to her case worker, she becomes distraught. She learns she no longer meets the “work requirement” and will no longer receive support for child care. Even with scholarship funds from the Y, the parent can simply not afford the full- time child care – what should she do?”

If the ultimate goal is for assistance programs to help lift families out of poverty, we have to consider the fact that just having a job isn't enough. Opportunities for continuing education and technical training are proven ways to increase earning potential, and the Y feels we all have responsibility to ensure that the system supports these families.

The Y also supports the removal of the “non-cooperative with child support” provision within the bill. Our primary concern with current statute requirements is what happens when a family trying to enroll in one of our programs is denied child care assistance due to the child support requirement. If the family cannot afford fees without child care assistance funds, parents then have to make an extremely difficult decision – do they not enter the workforce at all? Do they place their children in unlicensed, and often unsafe care? Or do they bounce kids from place to place with friends, family or neighbors just so they can go to work. None of these options are what is best for Kansas children. We urge your support for House Bill 2525.

KANSAS STATE ALLIANCE OF YMCAS

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