

December 17, 2012

Chairwoman Landwehr and Health Policy Oversight Committee Members,

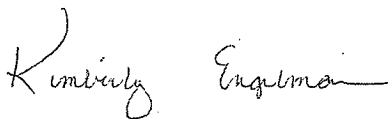
As some of you may know, I have a long-standing keen interest in supporting the health and welfare of Kansas children in child care. Over the past eight years, I have served as a parent advocate who also happens to hold a doctorate degree and have extensive public and behavioral health experience. My journey as a parent advocate began when my daughter, Lexie Engelman, died as a result of injuries she sustained at a Kansas day care home in 2004. As you all are well aware, Lexie was a completely healthy 13-month old girl whose death was due to provider negligence and entirely preventable.

In the year following Lexie's death, I started to look more intently at the system of childcare in Kansas. What I found was an appalling system riddled with outdated health and safety standards, inadequate provider training requirements, and a licensing division with little authority to enforce the regulations that were in place. Fast forward to 2012 and you'll see a completely transformed child care system – one in which child care providers engage in bolstered pre-service and annual education to better their knowledge and skills to benefit the health, safety, nourishment, and development of children in their care. We also now have a system where every above-ground child care facility is licensed and receives an annual inspection by a trained surveyor using a systematic process guided and facilitated by tablet computer software. Furthermore, this surveyor information is accessible online immediately and at no charge to the consumers of child care centers and homes – the parents. All of these successes are due to the diligence of many stakeholders, parents, and bipartisan legislators across Kansas who found it important to advance the critically important field of child care from being considered as 'babysitting' to more of a professional stance in which day care center owners and family day care home owners both are considered as business owners with higher, professional expectations.

We all should be incredibly proud of our State's marked advancement in the child care oversight rankings published this year by Child Care Aware of America (formerly NAACCRRA). The great advancements afforded by Lexie's Law have been touted as 'landmark' and other States are taking notice and attempting to emulate what we have accomplished in Kansas. Nonetheless, there remains ample opportunity to improve child care in Kansas further. For example, regulations are only as good as the extent to which they are followed. It is my understanding that one Kansas child has died in child care this calendar year and that this death would have been prevented if supervision standards had been adhered to by the provider. ***Enhanced provider education that involves more than one on-site visit per year would provide invaluable active, hands-on training and instruction opportunities for providers.*** Running a child care facility should be considered a professional business endeavor in which the health and safety of children is the first and foremost priority, justifying the need for liability insurance. ***The provision of liability insurance would protect child care providers from potential financial ruin if tragedy were to strike in their facility/home and provide resources for parents to pay for required medical care and potential damage recuperation.*** Lastly, ***it is critically important that we ensure proper local, state, and nationwide background checks are performed on prospective providers and classroom teachers.*** It still stands today, that if a child dies due to negligence while in a provider's care and criminal charges are not pressed (which often is the case), that same provider literally can move across the state line and open another day care business without anyone noticing. This lack of nationwide background check standard leaves our children in danger.

In closing, I appreciate your continued interest in ensuring high quality health and safety standards in Kansas' child care and attention to systems that support the ongoing implementation of Lexie's Law. I also look forward to continuing our State's legacy as one that puts forth children, our most vulnerable population, and their working families as a clear priority.

Warm Regards,



Dr. Kim Engelman
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