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Informational Briefing on Child Care in Kansas  
House Committee on Children and Seniors

Chairwoman Concannon and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the urgent needs of child care in Kansas. While the pandemic brought the issues in the child care system to the foreground, parents, providers, and ultimately the children in care have been living, working, and learning with a broken system for years before COVID-19 appeared. Every person involved with child care is trapped in a vicious cycle over which they have little control.

Over the last few decades, child care has transitioned from being a luxury into being a necessity. If you have a little kid at home, chances are you need child care. In most households, all adults must work – a single paycheck doesn't go very far for a family.

On the other side of the equation are the providers. They work in various settings, as you'll hear about from the other conferees, but regardless of environment one thing remains true – it is very hard, and very expensive, to provide high-quality child care. It can't be automated, and you can't pick up a crying infant via Zoom. It requires physical, mental, and emotional presence from the provider, and the limits of our humanity mean that a single provider can only properly care for so many children at once. The time and monetary investment don't even begin to account for the cost of safety and cleaning equipment, educational and play materials, or the ever-important afternoon snacks.

Here we arrive at the heart of the problem: If providers increase their prices, families won't be able to afford care. If families can't afford care, caregivers won't be able to work or support their families. At the same time, the costs of running a child care business mean the people Kansans entrust to care for their children are often making minimum wage or slightly more. That means fewer and fewer people enter the early learning field and more providers close. Meanwhile, children are left without access to high-quality child care and the lifelong benefits associated with it.

There are no bad actors involved and there is no behavior above that we want to discourage. We want working people to have children and start families. We want people to become child care providers and work here in Kansas and make a livable wage at the same time. We want children to grow up in safe and nurturing environments. The best solution to fixing the child care system is through modest public investment.

It's going to take a group effort, and there are some ways the Kansas Legislature can help. You can expand eligibility to the tax credit – which is already on the books! – for businesses to help their employees find and/or pay for child care. You can help more parents afford care through the child care assistance program. You can help bring more professionals into the field by expanding scholarship programs and providing financial incentives for quality and experience. Lastly, you can listen to the parents and providers you represent, and they'll tell you what they need to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information with you today. Feel free to reach me if you have any questions at [mitch@kac.org](mailto:mitch@kac.org).