



November 14, 2019

Co-Chairs Janis Lee and Steve Morris
Governor's Council on Tax Reform

Dear Senators Lee and Morris,

Thank you for this opportunity to share testimony related to the future tax plan for our State of Kansas.

Kansas has a laudable history of pragmatic investment in the resources that have gained this state a reputation for innovative policies and practices such as the Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund and the Children's Initiative Fund, the CIF which have supported a strong and healthy population of children and families. Many of these investments were lost or severely damaged during the recent years of the failed tax plan which thankfully, you are now working to replace. A state that invests in the healthy development of children is poised for a bright future of able and ready workers to engage in a strong economy.

Early childhood services support the ability of Kansas businesses to attract employees to our communities. Services such as home visiting for new moms, an adequate supply of quality childcare in a mixed delivery system, state investment in Head Start and Early Head Start and school-based Pre-K programs will provide vital resources and drive positive outcomes for Kansas families.

The lack of childcare resources is currently having a very negative impact on economic development in many communities. Investment in the childcare workforce through wage support strategies will help build a viable career path and livelihood for this vital resource to the larger Kansas workforce. The Kansas childcare workforce is currently in a crisis level deficit due to low wages and the lack of healthcare and other employee benefits. In addition to the current lack of available staff, a recent workforce supply survey revealed a potential wave of retirement from this already stressed workforce. This deficit prevents parents from entering or staying in the workforce. It also drives an informal, unregulated childcare market with no assurance as to the quality of care, safety or appropriate child development curricula. The childcare industry can become a significant player in the economy as a source of employee tax revenue, support to economic development and the healthy development of young children.

Healthy people make healthy workers. Kansas needs to invest in the health of today's population to assure a healthy population tomorrow. Areas needing attention include adequate mental health services for adults and children, substance use treatment and rural healthcare resources. Kansas needs to expand Medicaid to allow greater access to health and mental health services. Continued lack of resources and services undermine the ability of the Kansans to be successful workers.



A strong social safety-net system which supports and rewards employment allows Kansas residents to rebound and recover when significant misfortune strikes. Negative situations such as divorce, death of a spouse, homelessness, health crisis, domestic violence, mental health and substance use challenges do not have to ruin lives when robust human service and workforce development systems exist and collaborate. Kansas business wins when workers can be stabilized, equipped and supported in a return to the workforce.

The very real challenges facing Kansas families are illustrated in the stories of a Topeka dad and Wichita family.

A father receiving services from the Community Action, Inc Head Start program in Topeka shared this story.

When my daughter was born, she needed a feeding tube and was diagnosed with Failure to Thrive. Her mother passed away shortly after and I was left as a single dad.

Community Action's Early Head Start program saved her life and probably mine too. Her daily interaction with the other kids and the care she received from the staff really helped her thrive. It also gave me time while she was at school to get my thoughts together. It helped me keep going when times seemed really hard.

Today her feeding tube is no longer needed and she's progressing with really using her leg muscles. I honestly don't know what we would do without Community Action Early Head Start and Head Start programs.

A Head Start Home Visitor in Wichita met with a family living in a one-bedroom apartment. The young child snored so loudly the family never experienced a good night's sleep. Once the nurse at the Head Start program helped connect the family with an ENT specialist the child was found to have enlarged adenoids. Through proper diagnosis and treatment including In-Kind services from the ENT, the family's situation has improved, and they are now able to sleep.

Kansas is receiving positive attention from the Centers for Disease Control for the Making the Business Case for Prevention through the Kansas Power of the Positive project. This work engages employers in family friendly practices and showcases the benefits for the businesses. Policies which encourage the implementation of family friendly practices build the reputation of Kansas as a state that values and invests in children and families, making it attractive to workers and business.

A state that recognizes investment in its people as a powerful economic strategy will be a bright spot in our nation. I have said to my colleagues many times that Kansas led the way into the darkness and is now leading the way out. Thank you for carrying the lantern.

Respectfully submitted,
Peggy Kelly
Executive Director