
Testimony of Barry Downing, President of Northrock, Inc.

House Bill No. 2371
Committee on Children and Seniors
February 18, 2021

Chairman Concannon and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill No. 2371. My name is Barry Downing. I am a Kansas businessperson and president of Northrock, Inc. Northrock is based in Wichita with subsidiary companies in the restoration, oil and gas, hotel management, and real estate development industries. My family also maintains a charitable endowment that supports numerous Kansas community causes. These organizations in total employ approximately 230 people across Kansas.

As a businessperson, I have been a longtime advocate of early education. I have seen firsthand the economic effect high-quality childhood education has on our families, businesses and communities, and I believe it offers the best return on investment strategy for our economy. When parents do not have access to affordable, consistent care, we all suffer. As highlighted during the recent pandemic crisis, child care access has been a significant challenge in the effort to keep our schools, businesses, and communities open.

In order to address this challenge, we must begin identifying opportunities to lessen the financial strain child care places on Kansas families. In Kansas, infant care costs 28% more than in-state tuition at a four-year public college. That equates to a minimum wage employee working full-time for 39 weeks just to pay child care for one infant¹. Child care is one of the biggest expenses families will face and for many, the cost makes it out of reach. How can we expect at-risk families to overcome this arduous obstacle? Not only does lack of affordable, accessible child care affect the life outcomes of the family, but it also affects our business environment and efforts to strengthen our economy.

The education exemptions outlined in House Bill No. 2371 encourage parents to improve their situations through education, without fear of losing benefits that help supplement food and care for their child. A better educated and productive citizenry is good for business. The proposed changes also rightfully remove the child support restrictions that potentially jeopardize the safety of women and their children. These changes are simple, but important steps in addressing the barriers families face while working to improve their lives. I urge you to support Bill No. 2371 and other efforts to make high-quality child care accessible to all Kansans. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have now or in the future.

Sincerely,

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¹Economic Policy Institute, **The Cost of Child Care in Kansas**, October 2020. <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/KS>