

Written Testimony of **USD 470 Early Literacy Initiative**  
Proponent for HB 2176

**March 13, 2023**

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to supply written testimony in support of HB2176 regarding the creation of the Arkansas City Area Library District. I serve as the Early Literacy Coordinator in Cowley County, which oversees the USD 470 Early Literacy Initiative (a collective impact collaborative funded by the Kansas Health Foundation).

The services of the Arkansas City Public Library are crucial to combatting the illiteracy epidemic in our community. Cowley County data indicates that approximately 53% of adults in our county are either functionally illiterate or struggle with text-based materials (PIACC, <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac>). Additionally, 74% of our third graders score below “proficient” on ELA state assessments, and children not reading proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of school than their peers!

Research tells us that starting early is one of the most preventative approaches that we can take. Access to high quality early learning environments prior to entering kindergarten has been linked to long-term health outcomes including higher educational attainment and post-secondary success. Further, we know that the greatest amount of brain growth (85%) occurs between birth and age five, before a child ever enters the doors of kindergarten. By the age of 2, children who are read to regularly display greater language comprehension and higher cognitive skills than their peers (readingisfundamental.org, firstreaders.org & firstthingsfirst.org). **But how and where do we reach children and their families during this crucial stage of development? We must work towards critical early support systems if we hope to combat this deeply rooted challenge.**

Libraries play a crucial role in bridging gaps to create book access, model family engagement, create programming, and connect caregivers to community resources. Supporting our public libraries with funding and the ability to reach more families with young children is a preventative, upstream approach towards community health. It is for these reasons that I support this legislation and ask that you recommend it favorably.

Respectfully,

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