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David Jordan, President and CEO
United Methodist Health Ministry Fund
Proponent Testimony for SB 513
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Chairman Billinger and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of SB 513, which strengthens Kansas' Child Care Assistance Program through direct-to-provider payments. Kansas' Child Care Assistance Program is the state's most reliable way to improve access to child care. However, administrative challenges create barriers for providers to participate.

Reliable child care is essential for Kansas' workforce and economy, yet families and child care providers continue to face avoidable challenges in navigating the Child Care Assistance Program. Today, only 7.4% of potentially eligible Kansas children receive child care subsidy, and only about 40% of licensed child care providers participate, often citing administrative burden and difficulties collecting payments as major deterrents.

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a 40-year-old, \$80 million non-partisan health philanthropy based in Hutchinson. Our mission is to improve the health of all Kansans through cooperative and strategic philanthropy guided by Christian principles. We focus on three strategic areas: access to care, thriving children, and engaged congregations and communities - a program aimed at addressing community health by engaging churches throughout Kansas.

A key component of our work is helping ensure all Kansas children have the support they need to grow up healthy and equipped for success throughout life. For this reason, we support policies that strengthen the systems families rely on to access safe, stable child care while they work. When the Child Care Assistance Program functions effectively, it supports healthy child development, enables parents to participate in the workforce, and helps stabilize the child care providers who serve communities across Kansas.

SB 513 puts Kansas on a clear path to modernizing the Child Care Assistance Program by directing the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), in coordination with the Kansas Office of Early Childhood (KOEC), to develop, procure, and implement a streamlined child care subsidy management and payment system designed to support direct-to-provider payments.

This bill takes a deliberate and responsible approach to modernization by:

- **Establishing coordinated leadership between DCF and KOEC** in all phases of assessment, procurement, and implementation.
- **Requiring a comprehensive Request for Information (RFI)** to gather information about available technology, system functionality, costs, and implementation timelines.
- **Requiring a legislative report** outlining findings, recommendations, and estimated costs before moving forward with procurement.

- **Allowing phased implementation**, including pilot approaches and a gradual transition from the current system.

Modernizing how Kansas administers child care subsidy is critical to improving access to care for families and strengthening the child care workforce. Under our current system, families regularly describe the subsidy application and enrollment process as confusing and difficult to navigate.

At the same time, child care providers report challenges verifying family eligibility, navigating payment systems, and collecting payments. These challenges create financial uncertainty that discourages participation in the subsidy program. When child care providers decline to accept subsidy because of payment risks, families can be left without viable child care options.

Direct-to-provider payments help address these barriers by ensuring payments are predictable, timely, and transparent. This stability encourages more child care providers to participate in the program and helps families access the care they need to work and support their families.

SB 513 represents an important step toward building a child care system that is predictable, accessible, and aligned with the needs of Kansas families and providers. By modernizing subsidy management and payment systems, Kansas can reduce administrative burden, strengthen provider participation, and support long-term sustainability of the program.

We support SB 513 and hope that you will join us in supporting this important legislation to strengthen Kansas' Child Care Assistance Program and improve access to child care for working families.

Thank you for your consideration.