March 8, 2016

Erick Vaughn
Executive Director, Kansas Head Start Association
Testimony for Senate Bill 463
Senate Ways and Means Committee

Chairman Masterson and Members of the Committee:

The Partnership for Early Success (PES) appreciates the opportunity to express our opposition to the proposed changes to the Kansas early childhood funding structure contained in Senate Bill 463. PES is a diverse coalition of organizations that serves as a grassroots voice for young children in Kansas. I am testifying on behalf of the Partnership for Early Success Leadership Team, which consists of the Alliance for Childhood Education, Child Care Aware of Kansas, Educare/Project Eagle, Kansas Action for Children, the Kansas Children’s Service League, the Kansas Head Start Association, the Kansas Parents as Teachers Association, and the Tiny-K Alliance. On behalf of the community of Kansans who believe that a child’s early years are the most important opportunity to prepare them for a lifetime of success, we ask you to oppose Senate Bill 463.

Maintaining a dedicated funding stream and structure for children’s programs is essential to protect Kansas’ commitment to invest in young Kansas children. Senate Bill 463 would eliminate the Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund and the Children’s Initiatives Fund (CIF), jeopardizing early childhood programs.

**Abolishing a dedicated funding structure removes stability for future years.** There is no guarantee that future Legislatures will appropriate money from the State General Fund for early childhood programs. Setting aside tobacco settlement dollars in the KEY Fund and the CIF designates them for their intended purpose, creating stability and predictability for CIF grantees. This has created a highly efficient system, which was highlighted by the Legislature’s efficiency study as the gold standard of government accountability.

**The existing system includes protections for early childhood funding.** Under the current structure, the Legislature or the Governor must take action to re-appropriate funds intended to serve young children. Shifting those dollars out into the SGF would reverse this protection,
instead requiring the Legislature and the Governor to take action to appropriate tobacco settlement money in each budget cycle.

**Shifting tobacco funds into the State General Fund weakens checks and balances.** This change will undermine the current role of the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, the bipartisan, quasi-government agency that ensures accountable investment in children’s programs. Amending the statute removes a long-standing, successful system of checks and balances within the early learning system.

The Partnership for Early Success is committed to providing Kansas children from birth to age 8 the best possible start in life through access to diverse, high-quality early care and education, health, and family support services. We respectfully request that committee members act to preserve opportunities for young Kansans and oppose changes to the funding structure of the KEY Fund and the CIF in Senate Bill 463.