



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
**WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM**

BILL NUMBER: <b>HB 2379</b>		DATE: <b>2/2/2026</b>	
COMMITTEE: <b>Ways and Means</b>			
<b>TESTIFYING:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>CHARLI COOKSEY</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>314-348-0392</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>WEPOWER</b>		TITLE: <b>FOUNDER/CEO</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>20 SOUTH SARAH STREET</b>			
CITY: <b>ST. LOUIS</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>63108</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>		
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>		
WITNESS NAME: <b>D. SCOTT PENMAN</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-690-6772</b>
REPRESENTING: <b>ST. LOUIS COUNTY CHILDRENS SERVICES FUND</b>		TITLE: <b>OWNER</b>
ADDRESS:		
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>	STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL: <b>scott@penman.group</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 4:39 PM</b>
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**Written testimony provided supporting HB2379**



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>		
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>		
WITNESS NAME: <b>DENISE WIESE</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>618-978-9243</b>
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>LEMAY CHILD AND FAMILY CENTER</b>		TITLE: <b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>
ADDRESS: <b>9828 S. BROADWAY</b>		
CITY: <b>ST. LOUIS</b>	STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>63125</b>
EMAIL: <b>dwiese@lemaychildandfamily.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 10:30 AM</b>

**THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.**

Thank you, Representative Williams for sponsoring this bill and thank you Chairman and members of the Committee for your time. I am in support of House Bill 2379.

I am Denise Wiese Executive Director of the Lemay Child and Family Center, we are a nonprofit early childhood education provider serving children from six weeks to five years old in St. Louis County. During my 25 years at the Center, I have witnessed thousands of families struggling to make ends meet, with some families spending 20 percent of their income on childcare services. We also see parents working multiple jobs in order to afford childcare. In addition, the fees paid by these families covers only a portion of the cost of delivering high-quality care.

For those of us in the industry, the child care crisis has been a concern for decades, with access and affordability being an ongoing issue. Providers have struggled to balance rising operational costs with families' limited ability to pay. As a result, access to high-quality early learning remains challenging for our entire region, particularly for working families with limited resources. This crisis continues to become more severe each year.

At our Center we welcome any family regardless of the family's income or the educational needs of the child. I appreciate the tremendous work undertaken at the state level to support childcare funding, but state funding alone cannot fully address the gap in access to high-quality care. Providers need predictable, sustainable funding to ensure that all families have access to this care.

House Bill 2379 addresses these challenges by making childcare more affordable for parents, improving access, and supporting quality across the early childhood education system. By reducing the financial burden on families, this legislation would support parental employment, expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities and stabilize the childcare workforce.

Research has shown for everyone \$1 invested we can receive a \$16 return. This legislation would save a family with children under age five thousands of dollars per year.

High-quality early childhood education is a proven investment with long-term benefits, including improved school readiness, better educational outcomes, and stronger economic participation. The services we provide support not only children, but families and employers throughout the region. This bill is a strategic investment in Missouri's children, its workforce, and its economic future.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>DOUG NELSON</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-690-7209</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>CHILDCARE AWARE OF MISSOURI</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>235 E HIGH STREET, SUITE 301</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>GRETA M. BAX</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-556-3683</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>WEPOWER</b>		TITLE: <b>ATTORNEY</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>230 W MCCARTY STREET</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL: <b>greta.bax@stinson.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 2:09 PM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>MICHAEL GROTE</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-424-5120</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>BOONE COUNTY MISSOURI</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>PO BOX 638</b>			
CITY: <b>COLUMBIA</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65205</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>		
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>		
WITNESS NAME: <b>ROB WHITTEN</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>816-832-6698</b>
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES FUND OF JACKSON COUNTY</b>		TITLE: <b>CEO</b>
ADDRESS: <b>2345 GRAND BOULEVARD, SUITE 1450</b>		
CITY: <b>KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>
		ZIP: <b>64108</b>
EMAIL: <b>rob@jacokids.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 10:57 AM</b>

**THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.**

I am Rob Whitten, the Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Services Fund of Jackson County. I am submitting this statement in support of HB2379. Childcare is critical to our community, and the Children's Service Fund invests in a number of early childhood centers to strengthen their programming. Despite that investment, funding continues to be a challenge for many of these essential organizations, and those funding restraints result in not enough capacity for all children. HB2379 will provide for the streamlined administration of potential tax revenues collected for the purpose of establishing an early childhood education fund and also ensure that revenues raised for this purpose are not used for another purpose that was not approved by the voters by housing the funds at an already established Children's Services Fund (CSF). Should voters choose to create a new revenue stream in support of early childhood education, housing that funding at an existing CSF would allow for more efficient use of these tax revenues, as existing boards are already well-established with a functioning administrative infrastructure.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>ROBYN SCHELP</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>660-441-3260</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>KIDS WIN MISSOURI</b>		TITLE: <b>DIRECTOR OF POLICY &amp; ADVOCACY</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>3909 SHERMAN CT</b>			
CITY: <b>COLUMBIA</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65203</b>
EMAIL: <b>rschelp@kidswinmissouri.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 4:19 PM</b>	

**THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.**

My name is Robyn Schelp, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy for Kids Win Missouri. We advocate for issues of child well-being, including child care and early education, child welfare, and healthcare. Kids Win Missouri supports House Bill 2379, and we appreciate Representative Williams' leadership on this important legislation.

Missouri is currently facing a severe child care crisis that threatens both the well-being of our families and the stability of our state economy. Research shows that 97% of Missouri counties are classified as child care deserts for infants and toddlers. This lack of access is more than just a family challenge; it is a significant economic hurdle, costing Missouri an estimated \$1.35 billion in lost economic activity each year. Missouri businesses lose nearly \$1 billion (\$951 million) each year due to employee absenteeism and turnover driven by child care needs. For many families, the average annual cost of care—reaching up to \$18,000 per child—is simply unaffordable. HB 2379 offers a critical, community-driven tool to help address these challenges head-on.

HB 2379 provides a framework for counties to address local needs through several key provisions: Streamlined Administration and Voter Intent: This bill streamlines the administration of tax revenue collected to establish an early childhood education fund. It ensures that revenues raised for this specific purpose are not diverted to uses not approved by voters.

Local Control Without Creating New Taxes: This statute does not create any new taxes. Instead, it provides the legal framework for how funds must be managed once voters in a county authorize a tax under a separate, existing statute.

Efficient Use of Existing Infrastructure: The bill allows voters to have their early childhood education fund administered by the same board of directors that administers their county's Community Children's Services Fund (CSF). Rather than requiring the creation of an entirely new board, this option allows for the more efficient use of tax revenues. These existing boards have well-established administrative infrastructure and expertise in managing public funds for children's services.

By passing HB 2379, you are giving Missouri communities the flexibility and the tools they need to build sustainable, efficient systems that support our children, our working parents, and our economy. We respectfully ask for your support of HB 2379.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>		
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>		
WITNESS NAME: <b>ARNIE C. DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE</b>		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE:      ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 11:58 PM</b>
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**I am Opposed to yet another Sale-Tax burden on Our Citizens.**



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>		
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>		
WITNESS NAME: <b>MELISSA THOMAS</b>		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE:      ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 8:12 PM</b>
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**I oppose this bill. MO already supports early childhood education in its current funding. We don't  
Want state run preschools and Don't want more state taxes.  
thank you**



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>		
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>		
WITNESS NAME: <b>SARAH BERRY</b>		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE:      ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/1/2026 9:49 AM</b>
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I submit this testimony in opposition to HB 2379.

While the stated goal of improving access to early childhood education is laudable, HB 2379 raises serious concerns regarding taxation equity, governance, and accountability.

As drafted, the bill authorizes a regressive sales tax while removing key statutory guardrails that currently protect voters, families, and public funds.

**1. The bill relies on a regressive tax mechanism**

HB 2379 authorizes counties (and cities not within a county) to impose an additional sales tax to fund early childhood education services.

Sales taxes disproportionately impact:

- Low-income families
- Working families with young children
- Households already burdened by rising costs of food, housing, and childcare

These are the same families the bill claims to prioritize.

The legislation provides no offset, rebate, or mitigation to address this inequity.

**2. HB 2379 removes critical voter-protection safeguards**

The bill places administration of the Early Childhood Education Fund under a board established pursuant to section 210.861, but explicitly exempts subsections (3) through (6) of that statute.

Those exempted provisions include:

- Restrictions on expanding funded services without voter approval
- Clear statutory limits on the scope of allowable expenditures
- Legacy guardrails designed to prevent mission creep

By exempting these protections, HB 2379 allows:

**Expansion or redirection of program scope after voter approval  
Broad discretion without a requirement for renewed voter consent**

**This undermines the principle that taxpayers approve not just the tax, but its defined purpose.**

### **3. Concentration of control in an unelected board**

**HB 2379 places sole administrative control of tax revenues and funded programs in a board of directors that:**

**Is not directly elected by voters**

**Is not subject to direct legislative control**

**Cannot be mandated by future state legislation to adjust spending without another local vote**

**While the bill includes some conflict-of-interest language, it does not sufficiently define:**

**Appointment transparency**

**Public reporting standards**

**Performance metrics**

**Appeals or complaint resolution for denied funding**

**This creates an accountability gap for a publicly funded program.**

### **4. Public funds may flow to for-profit and license-exempt providers**

**The bill authorizes funding for:**

**Public**

**Private**

**Not-for-profit**

**For-profit**

**License-exempt and informal child care providers**

**Without explicit statewide minimum standards tied to receipt of public funds, this structure risks:**

**Inconsistent quality and safety**

**Uneven oversight**

**Public money supporting providers with limited regulatory supervision**

**Flexibility must not come at the expense of child safety, transparency, or measurable outcomes.**

### **5. Governance flexibility without enforceable outcomes**

**HB 2379 emphasizes flexibility but does not require:**

**Uniform outcome reporting**

**Independent audits beyond board discretion**

**Clear benchmarks for effectiveness**

**As a result, voters may approve a tax without guaranteed visibility into whether it actually improves affordability, access, or quality.**

**HB 2379 asks voters to approve a new sales tax while weakening existing statutory guardrails, expanding administrative discretion, and reducing direct accountability over time.**

**Early childhood education deserves stable, equitable funding and strong public oversight.**

**This bill provides funding authority without sufficient structural protections to ensure transparency, voter control, and consistent standards.**

**For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to OPPOSE HB 2379.**

**These concerns are based on the plain language of HB 2379 and existing Missouri statutory and constitutional provisions and are submitted to preserve the legislative record.**

**Footnotes: [1] Missouri Revised Statutes § 67.547, RSMo (current law)**

**Section 67.547 authorizes counties to submit sales tax proposals to voters for specified purposes and**

includes restrictions on resubmission timelines and use of revenues strictly for voter-approved purposes.

**[2] HB 2379, § 67.547.1–3 (103rd General Assembly)**

HB 2379 authorizes an additional county sales tax for early childhood education services, contingent upon voter approval, and permits rates up to one-half of one percent, subject to combined rate ceilings.

**[3] Missouri Constitution, Article X, § 3 (Taxation Uniformity)**

Sales taxes are widely recognized as regressive in effect, disproportionately impacting lower-income households, including families with young children.

**[4] HB 2379, § 67.5420.2**

The bill places sole administrative control of the Early Childhood Education Fund with a board of directors established pursuant to section 210.861 and restricts state legislative mandates on fund expenditures absent additional voter approval.

**[5] Missouri Revised Statutes § 210.861, subsections (3)–(6), RSMo**

Section 210.861 includes voter-protection guardrails such as limits on service expansion without voter approval, defined categories of allowable services, and expenditure restrictions. HB 2379 expressly exempts the Early Childhood Education Fund from these provisions.

**[6] HB 2379, § 67.5420.2(4)**

The bill explicitly states that subsections 3 to 6 of section 210.861 shall not apply to revenues deposited into the Early Childhood Education Fund, removing statutory limitations present in the Community Children’s Services Fund model.

**[7] Missouri Revised Statutes Chapter 210 & Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Child Care Regulations**

Missouri law permits certain child care providers to operate as license-exempt under defined circumstances; however, license exemption does not equate to uniform regulatory oversight or quality standards.

**[8] HB 2379, § 67.5420.1–2**

HB 2379 authorizes funding for public, private, not-for-profit, for-profit, licensed, license-exempt, and informal child care providers, without establishing statewide minimum standards tied to receipt of public funds.

**[9] Missouri Sunshine Law, Chapter 610, RSMo**

Boards administering public funds are subject to open-meetings and records requirements; however, the bill does not specify enhanced reporting, outcome metrics, or independent audit requirements beyond board discretion.

**[10] Missouri State Auditor – Performance Audit Principles**

Public funds administered by independent boards benefit from explicit statutory requirements for transparency, measurable outcomes, and external audit authority to ensure accountability and public trust.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>CASSANDRA KAUFMAN</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>314-535-6964</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>ST. LOUIS MENTAL HEATH BOARD</b>		TITLE: <b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>701 MARKET STREET, SUITE 200</b>			
CITY: <b>ST. LOUIS</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>63101</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/2/2026 12:00 AM</b>	
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