

Great Bend Economic Development

3111 10th Street

Great Bend, KS 67530

(620) 796-2407

marketing@gbedinc.com

www.gbedinc.com



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Great Bend Economic Development awarded a \$4.38M grant for an innovative, community center focused on childcare, entrepreneurship, workforce, and healthcare

GREAT BEND, KS – In a significant move to address the growing childcare needs in Kansas, Governor Laura Kelly, in collaboration with the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, has announced the allocation of nearly \$28 million in Capital Projects Fund Accelerator (CPF Accelerator) awards. This substantial investment will result in the creation of 458 new childcare slots across seven communities in the state.

Great Bend, a key recipient, will receive \$4,382,493 through Great Bend Economic Development (GBED) and Advancing Barton County Childcare (ABCC). These funds will be utilized to establish an innovative community hub, featuring overnight childcare facilities, a makerspace, a workforce center, and health screening services.

Collaborating partners from the University of Kansas Health Systems, KansasWorks, Barton Community College, and ABCC have joined forces to introduce services currently unavailable in the region. GBED President, Sara Arnberger, expressed enthusiasm, stating, "We are excited to bring this one-of-a-kind center to Barton County." The center addresses the pressing demand for overnight childcare in Barton County, supporting the local workforce’s growth. The allocated funds will contribute to the construction of the multi-purpose community facility, expanding licensed childcare slots, providing high-speed internet access, and accommodating programs that enhance work, education, and healthcare monitoring.

Governor Laura Kelly highlighted the crucial role of accessible childcare in supporting families, stating, "There’s no question that more Kansas families need access to childcare to support their child’s development, enter the workforce, and contribute to our economy." The IGNITE Innovation Center, a collaborative effort with various partners, aims to address local workforce and childcare needs, adding 28 childcare slots to the area.

Funded through the American Rescue Plan (ARPA), the U.S. Department of Treasury Capital Projects Fund awarded \$40 million to Kansas in early September. Melissa Rooker, Executive Director of the

Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, expressed excitement about the projects, stating, "These are exciting projects that will improve the quality of life, support job seekers, provide innovative resources for continuing education, and improve health outcomes for families."

Chair of the Kansas Children's Cabinet, Don Hineman, commended the collaborative efforts of communities across Kansas, stating, "It is impressive to see communities come together to develop such innovative approaches to meeting their childcare needs. It is truly an honor to have the opportunity to support these efforts."

About GBED (Great Bend Economic Development):

The Great Bend Economic Development, Inc. is a public/private partnership focusing on the economic development efforts in Barton County, KS. Our mission is to improve the economic quality of life for working families in our community. We do this by creating jobs, through retention, recruitment, and expansion of businesses, strengthening the workforce through recruitment, education and training, improving and increasing the number of living wage jobs, and expanding the tax base through increase capital investment. For more information about GBED visit: www.gbedinc.com, call 620-796-2407. Sara Arnberger, President of Great Bend Economic Development, Inc., can be reached via email at director@gbedinc.com.

About ABCC (Advancing Barton County Childcare):

Advancing Barton County Childcare, Inc.'s mission is to provide quality, reliable and sustainable childcare solutions to the citizens of Barton County. This organization was born from conversations with our businesses where they expressed that lack of childcare was a major barrier to hiring employees. As a partner of Great Bend Economic Development, we always strive to keep our businesses informed and at the table. For questions about ABCC, Inc., our partnership with GBED, please reach out online: www.gbedinc.com/abcc, call 620-796-2407, or email Sara Arnberger, President of Great Bend Economic Development, Inc., at director@gbedinc.com.

