

Chairman Lee and Members of Human Service Committee,

My name is Amber Osowski and I am a childcare provider in Walsh County. I am 34 years old and got my first job in childcare when I was 14 years old, 20 years ago! I have been running my own childcare for 6 years and I have 30 children enrolled and a staff of 13.

The first and most pressing concern I see is the requirement that a provider meets the highest level in a voluntary quality improvement process. I currently sit at Step 2 though Bright & Early and the time and money commitment for myself and staff is a massive undertaking. We are all already working 40 hours each week, sometimes more. We DO NOT have the time during the day to complete the trainings because it would affect the quality of care we strive to provide for the children in our care. And to ask my staff to stay after hours to complete training or do it during the weekend is out of the question from a mental and financial standpoint. This also means that I, as the owner, am taking a huge risk in helping my staff attain these credentials and then them leaving to work at or open their own childcare. While that sounds wonderful that they would be confident enough to open another childcare business, it would be detrimental to my business and the families I serve. I pride myself on operating a quality program and treating my staff and families in my care well and I have a very low turnover rate for both. My recommendation would be to provide funding at a tiered level to offset some of the costs associated with working towards another step in the quality rating system. This would provide funding to cover some of the overtime hours or extra staffing needed to maintain proper care ratios while my staff work to attain a higher rating.

My second concern is about the stabilization program monthly payments. My understanding is the payments would be made based on licensed capacity. I would recommend that payments are made based on actual enrollment numbers. My current license is for 30 and is full with 30 enrolled children. I am working to serve my community by filling to capacity. However, there are other childcare businesses who carry a license of 30 but only enroll 7 or 8 and are not willing to hire staff and expand their enrolled children. My recommendation would be to increase the dollar amount to cover only enrolled children rather than covering license capacity. It ensures the businesses working to fill all open spots are receiving the funding to keep their doors open. The funding received in previous grants helped me to grow my business and I didn't have to raise rates for the families in my care. Continuing to ensure the funds are used by businesses supporting their communities is important for the state of ND

My final recommendation is that if the funds received for this bill are to be used to support staff wages and benefits then it should include a payment made specifically for that. Growing Futures website already keeps track of staffing and hours for each licensed childcare so a payment made to the childcare provider for the staff they have working would be business changing. It would encourage hiring, ensure owners are working to retain their employees and show these employees that the state has their back when it comes to the important work they do, and it does not add cost to the families in our care.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate all the work you are doing to support the families of North Dakota

Amber Osowski

Rocking Horse Child Care LLC

Rockinghorse.grafton@gmail.com

(701) 238-4277