

Testimony by

Nicole Stevahn

House Bill No. 1119

Senate Workforce Development Committee Senator

Mike Wobbema, Chairman March 6, 2025

Hello, my name is Nicole Stevahn. I am the owner of Charge on Together Childcare, a residential group childcare facility. While I am in favor of conducting a study on the ND century code for childcare, I oppose House Bill 1119 that was recently introduced to the House committee. The drastic changes proposed to the laws, policies, and administrative rules for early childhood services will significantly impact many providers and families in North Dakota, along with our state's economy.

The proposed changes have not been supported by sufficient validated assessments and in-depth research, nor has there been adequate time to fully evaluate and support these changes. The data collection period was only a few months, with minimal feedback from other providers and associations involved in childcare. Implementing major changes when most providers are already struggling will hinder our childcare industry and affect our state's economy.

I have owned and operated my childcare facility for 10 years, starting as a small in-home provider with a few children, and growing into a group facility with 28 children and 5 staff members. By the end of this year, I will also become the owner of a childcare center. The journey to bring my childcare business to where it is today has been challenging, particularly in securing the necessary funding to create another center for our community. As an early childhood educator, I foresee a negative impact on many providers if Bill No. 1119 is rushed through. I believe the Senate committee should amend Bill No. 1119, as the House committee did, and continue with the existing laws, administrative rules, and policies until the study has been fully evaluated for the framework of early childhood educators in North Dakota.

The Early Childhood Services and the Department of Health and Human Services intend to reduce administrative challenges for providers with these changes to the ND century code. However, further studies and changes to the code after the Bill's passage will create more confusion and challenges. This could result in providers either downgrading to smaller in-home facilities with fewer children or upgrading to centers with more stringent rules, regulations,

training requirements, and costs. Changing the child-to-provider ratios will also hinder providers and families by reducing the number of available childcare spots and decreasing providers' income.

The proposed revisions have not been adequately discussed with group providers, who will be most affected. In North Dakota, three-quarters of licensed providers are group facilities. Additionally, changes in license type will depend on community board members' approval of residential facilities being licensed as commercial businesses in their areas. In my experience, obtaining approval to become a group facility in a residential area took six months with my committee board members in Jamestown, ND.

With the Senate committee's support in helping childcare providers grow, along with owning and operating small businesses in North Dakota, we can collectively strengthen our childcare industry—the backbone of our state's economic growth. This concludes my testimony, and I am available to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you

