

**Written Testimony of Katrina and Troy Hanenberg
before the Senate Human Services Committee
in support of HB 1347
March 3rd, 2021**

Good morning Madam Chair and senators, my name is Katrina Hanenberg and I live in Burleigh County (District 8) with my husband and two children.

I am here in support of House Bill 1347, as my daughter was a victim of abuse by her “unlicensed” daycare provider. On May 31, 2016, my daughter was airlifted to the Minneapolis Masonic children’s hospital, her diagnosis...subdural hematomas or brain bleeds, a skull fracture and retinal hemorrhaging. As you might expect, we were in disbelief that our daughter had such life-threatening injuries. We had no answers, other than to turn to the one person we entrusted with our child, our daycare provider.

Pleading with her for answers, all her explanations were filled with lies, deception and multiple inconclusive stories blaming other children for incidents she claimed were accidents.

At that point, our daycare provider walked away with a slap on the wrist, unsupervised probation, and a Class A Misdemeanor charge of false information to police. What my husband and I endured was entirely different. Our daughter was removed from us for 6 months. Legal harassment from social services ensued. The medical bills came due and our travel and legal fees fighting for her became insurmountable. Our mental state was the lowest in our lives. Here we were, being wrongly accused of hurting our daughter and put through what one can only describe as “hell” by Burleigh County Social Services.

As our social worker said...I’m sorry, the system is setup to blame the parents. Since it’s inconclusive on what happened to your daughter, and your provider was “unlicensed” there is nothing we can do to her.

Well, they were right, nothing did happen to her. She continued to provide daycare and provided care for foster children. That is, until, 6 months later, when a 4-year-old in her care was abused. Since this child could talk, the daycare provider’s path was different this time. She was found guilty of child abuse charges and served more jail time for our daughter’s case.

While I am satisfied some justice was served, I’m not at all satisfied with the process of how vulnerable children are entering daycares in which parents aren’t informed and can feel their children are safe.

I want to go back to the word “UNLICENSED”. And I want you to think about these three things that our current law allows with unlicensed daycares.

#1 Under our current state law, anyone with charges of sexual crimes against children or child abuse charges, can open a “UNLICENSED” daycare. Unchecked by the state, unregulated, and if that does not scare you, it should. My daycare provider was just released from prison in September. She can open another daycare right now too.

#2 If a child is abused in an unlicensed daycare setting; The state cannot go in and investigate what happened, inform parents, and shut the provider down. Stopping further abuse. If this bill, in its original form, were applicable in my case, that second child and their family could have avoided the pain and suffering we did.

#3 Currently the tools available for helping make parents with educated decisions in childcare is almost non-existent. When I was choosing a provider, I did everything a parent should. I used Child Care Aware with no luck. And in finding an unlicensed provider, I checked references, looked at prior work history and thoroughly checked the home, but that was not enough. With this bill, you are providing parents with more resources and informed decision making in choosing their daycare provider.

This bill is not intrusive and does not make it difficult to open a daycare. I know the importance of and the need for childcare services in our state. This bill only requires a \$15 application fee and a look into their background to make sure they are a safe provider. My current employer also checks to make sure anyone working with children in our after-school programs and recreational activities has a background check. A protocol to keep children safe. No one can argue that this is not important. I hope you agree.

I want to clarify that I appreciate the House Human Services committee acknowledging the loopholes in our current law. This is in regard to my prior statement which allows sexual offenders and child abusers access to operating unlicensed daycares. But I also want you to remember, you will never know they are operating without a registration. It solves little but making a threat if they are caught.

I want to leave you with the knowledge that after 3 brain surgeries and a multitude of therapy, our daughter is a healthy, happy 5-year-old today. I am grateful for this every day, but we were one of the lucky ones. Please consider passage of HB 1347 to protect future children.

Thank you for your time today.

Katrina Hanenberg