

My name is Kathy Busche and I own 2 childcare programs in Hazen, ND. One is a group 30 licensed facility where I care for children 0-5 years. The second is located in my home and I hold a group licensed home where I care for up to 30 school aged children (6-11 years). Between the two programs we currently care for a total of 54 children. We also offer non-traditional hours including night/weekend care. I am excited to see how the legislation can best support working families in North Dakota while supporting childcare providers as well and want to thank you for all your support and work so far this session.

I will try to be brief, but I want to address funding for the pilot program for 4 yr olds, or what the state calls Best In Class.

I previously submitted written testimony in opposition of funding Best in Class. Becoming a Best in Class program in the state is extremely difficult. I have a BS in Early Childhood Education. I am passionate about education and I researched Best in Class last session when the pilot program was being implemented. What I found is that it is nearly impossible for childcare providers or Centers to offer such classrooms in their programs. Best in Class limits class size to 9 or 18 depending on the number of teachers in the room. It also specifies that the children enrolled in the classrooms fall into the lowest 60% state median income similar to Head Start. That said, I am a Step 2 rated child care program. I could move to a Step 3 program and apply to be a Best in Class participant. This would be detrimental to the child care situation in my small community. I could close both my current programs where I am licensed to care for 60 children and create a single Best in Class program where I teach 9 children in a morning session and 9 children in an afternoon session. That decreases the available child care in our area by 60 full time slots and 10 people would be out of a job. Best in Class is simply not the answer.

That being said, I would like to remind the committee that Best in Class is Universal Pre-K. Be it voluntary or not, it is an academic preschool program. As Best in Class was just a pilot program last session I would like to see the longitudinal data showing that the children in these classrooms are making the great gains being promised. The children in this pilot program have barely finished Kindergarten at the current time so I am hard pressed to believe that we are already seeing huge gains academically. I heard a lot of discussion about Best in Class will mean that children are more engaged in upper elementary school and how they will be more prepared. Unfortunately research has shown time and time again that children who excel in early academic learning score no higher on standardized testing than their peers by grade 3. The link provided shows the data that suggests that early academics could actually cause more harm than we realize. [State Pre-K Research](#). I appreciate the Senate making changes and doing away with the funding for Waterford Upstart. No child should be learning online in my opinion. It is also important to note that there has been no longitudinal data showing the benefits of Waterford Upstart.

There was discussion in the Senate Human Service Committee about how children in foster care may benefit from the Best in Class program. I beg to differ. I am a foster

parent and currently have 2 children in my home. Children in foster care come into care with a host of social and emotional issues caused by adverse childhood experiences. They have experienced abuse and neglect and have had numerous traumatic experiences. These children need trauma informed child care programs that focus on social and emotional well-being. The last thing they need is to be in a program that focuses on academics. Brain research has shown that children with trauma live in fight or flight mode. It is very hard to focus on academics when you are worried about where your next meal is coming from, and if you think just because they are no longer in those traumatic situations that they no longer live in fight or flight mode I'm sorry, but you are mistaken. These kinds of traumatic experiences take a lifetime to work through. Also, children in foster care automatically qualify for Special Education services in our state, meaning they are unlikely to take advantage of this Best in Class program anyway.

We are in the middle of a childcare crisis and the Early Childhood budget proposal focuses on removing children from our programs and putting them in academic settings in order to get them ready for the next step. Four and Five year olds in our childcare programs are what makes mine and other child programs sustainable. Without this age group child care in our state is headed to an even worse crisis.

Spending \$12million dollars on a program that has zero longitudinal data to support it while childcare programs are struggling to keep rates affordable while providing wrap around care to those same children is just not what is best for North Dakota. These preschool type programs are typically half day programs or school day programs where the children are still in need of before and after school care. These children are costing the state twice the amount of children who just attend full time child care. Best in Class is a \$9,000 investment per child. This same child needs child care and falls into the lowest socioeconomic class meaning they have child care assistance (CCAP) funding to cover their full child care which is another \$9,000 investment. This just simply doesn't make sense for North Dakota.

If you find that you don't have enough information on Best In Class or child care I am available and willing to provide additional comments regarding the child care providers perspective on this issue.

Kathy Busche  
The Children's Playhouse  
Hazen, ND  
701-748-2084  
[kathybusche@gmail.com](mailto:kathybusche@gmail.com)