

My name is Jamie Lange, and I am providing testimony in support of SB 2301 as a working parent of three small children in West Fargo.

The childcare workforce supports the entire workforce. A recent survey distributed to all West Fargo residents found:

- 45% of respondents reported that the career of an adult in their household has been impacted due to lack of child care.
- 14% of respondents noted that an adult member of their household has left the workforce due to lack of childcare, and of those impacted 95% would reenter the workforce if childcare became more available and/or more affordable.
- In a survey of business owners, it was commonly reported that employees have been lost due to lack of child care availability.

The child care crisis in North Dakota has been an issue long before the pandemic. In 2017, my husband and I found out we were expecting our first child. Before we could wrap our minds around the news, we found out we needed to secure child care immediately or we may not get a spot. This was several weeks before my 1st trimester ended, which is well before most people inform the world they're expecting. We felt we didn't have much time to look into facilities to find the best care for our family because we had to just find something.

Fast-forward to 2020, we found out we were expecting twins. We notified our child care immediately to secure a spot, but unfortunately, the child care facility couldn't commit due to staffing shortages exacerbated by the pandemic. When my maternity leave ended, in order for me to return to work, we had to rely on our family and friends for several weeks until we could get into child care. Then, once we got in, within a few weeks the daycare started having staffing shortages which resulted in classrooms closures daily. This forced my husband and I to miss additional time at work during a very stressful period in our lives – transitioning back to the workplace with twin infants and a toddler. Eventually, I was forced to quit a job I loved from a ND based company to take a more flexible job with an out-of-state employer. And sadly, my husband and I will run into this issue again in the fall when my child goes to kindergarten as our daycare has already informed us they can't guarantee a spot, and we know there are limited options for before/after school care in our community. I pay more than \$40,000 a year for child care for my three children in Fargo, North Dakota. The lack of access to child care – coupled with paying double or triple a mortgage payment – should really get people thinking about all the ways this is wrong for our communities and state.

My story is one of many. I personally know many people who have had to quit their jobs to work at the daycare because they couldn't get their child in anywhere else. Every day, I see posts on social media from working parents desperate to find care because they're either at the end of their maternity leave, they're struggling to find before/after school care, or they have just been notified their daycare is closing on short notice (sometimes permanently).

We need to focus on long-term solutions to make this state desirable for not only families – but for businesses too. Numerous studies have proven that child care systems have a direct effect on businesses and the economy. Parents need a robust child care and early learning system to have peace of mind that their children are in safe, healthy, and nurturing learning environments, so that they can minimize disruptions to their work day and increase their productivity. Businesses need a robust child care and early learning system to get working parents back in the workforce and to employ quality and reliable workers who have minimal disruptions during their work day so they can be productive.

We are truly at a breaking point and beg lawmakers to listen to the child care experts and families affected by this crisis – all who are urging passage of SB 2310 with an increased investment of \$150 million to create a strong child care provider network.

North Dakota's kids, families, communities, employers, and economy depend on it.

Thank you,


Jamie Lange