

To whom it may concern:

My name is Haley Lentz and I am an in-home daycare provider in Grafton, ND. I have been open for 5 years. As a daycare provider as well as a parent to two toddlers, I am writing to you in favor of SB 2301. I recognize there will be fine tuning of this bill should it continue through the process, but I would also like to note the amounts proposed are far too low, they would not make any significant difference to in-home providers.

The previous grants we received as providers have been extremely valuable to keep most of our doors open without having to pass on the increasing cost of operation on the parents, who are also feeling the effects of a tough economic time. The state has passed bills that allow funding to parents through CCAP with a large threshold for qualifying and approval, as well as reimbursement/paying out nearly 100% of costs. While that is fantastic that our state has allocated money to help families keep their kids in childcare so that parents can continue to work and support themselves and our state economy, it does nothing to keep the cost of child care down. I have been in business 5 years and never had to raise my rates. Grants during COVID and the subsequent grants allowed me to keep my rates the same while not absorbing the increase cost from my own income. It seems to me that it is sometimes lost on the general public, that while as providers, we love what we do, we want to help children develop and have a safe and loving spaces to do it in, we all do need to make a profit. Since the grants have ended, I have had to raise rates and even then I don't know if it'll be enough.

Small communities, of which there are many in our state, do not have enough quality child care to begin with and the problem is getting worse. I operate under a group license, meaning I have the ability to hire an employee and increase the number of children I can provide care for. Even though our community could benefit greatly from a larger daycare, it is not an avenue I have ever ventured down, simply because I cannot afford to pay a decent wage to a quality worker without increasing the cost of tuition substantially. A stabilization grant would allow for that opportunity. While there are many other factors that would help keep daycare rates lower and more child cares open (especially in home child care), the immediate path would be to reissue stabilization grant to providers (at a greater amount than what the original bill proposes) so we can stay afloat.

To sum up, the path child care is on in North Dakota is a rocky one, without offering support to providers, rates will soar to the point of unaffordability to the majority of families (we are already on the brink of that) or providers will continue to shut their doors. Both these options are detrimental to everybody in our state, not just those with small children in care.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Haley Lentz