

Testimony
68th Legislative Assembly
Senate Education Committee
House Bill 1144
March 7, 2023
Submitted by: Sarah Myers

Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1144. My name is Sarah Myers, I've been a pediatric nurse for 7 years, child care health consultant for 21 years. I love children and have always worked with them. I am testifying today as a private citizen.

When I was thinking of testifying and what I would say, I thought of the movie "Few Good Men" with Tom Cruise, Jack Nicholson, Demi Moore. Tom's character asks Demi's character, "why do you like them so much?" Them being soldiers. "Because they sit on a wall and say "nothing is going to harm you tonight, not on my watch". That is how I think of early childhood professionals and the children they take care of. They are there to protect the children in their care on their watch. But to do this, they need the tools. We need to give them the tools...that is what this bill is about...giving early childhood professionals and teachers the tools, in this case education, to protect the children from abuse.

Early childhood professionals/ teachers are mandated reporters. They can get a misdemeanor if they don't report abuse. Most know they are mandated reporters, but some don't know what that means, what the signs/symptoms of abuse are, the types of abuse (neglect, physical, sexual, emotional, etc.), where or how to make a report, etc. How can they protect children if they don't know what to look for, what to do if they suspect, etc.?

This bill would help ensure that they know what to look for, where and how to make a report.

Early childhood professionals spend several hours a day, several days of the week, with the children in their care giving them the opportunity to build trusting relationships where the children may share with them that they are being mistreated by people in their home or in other settings they spend time when they are not in child care. Since the majority of children in child care are under the age of 5 years, early childhood professionals are helping children with their diapering/toileting, changing clothes, etc., so they are able to see bruising, marks, discharge/bleeding, etc. that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Children also can abuse each other. Child care programs provide environments where children are taking naps together, playing together, etc. where children may not be in sight due to supervision and the physical set-up of the environment. It is important for early childhood professionals to be aware of this so they can change their supervision practices or physical environments to keep children in their sight.

Presently, licensed early childhood professionals take Getting Started, which is a required training within 90 days of becoming licensed and employed, which contains information about abuse and being a mandated reporter. This training is a one-time training, and was just updated 9/30/21 to include more information on abuse and being a mandated reporter. Unfortunately, there are several providers who have not received this information, despite the importance, specifically those who have been providing care prior to this update.

Licensed early childhood services providers are required to take SIDS training before they can have unsupervised access to infants; SIDS training is a one hour training required on an annual basis if they care for infants. CPR/first aid training is required within 90 days of becoming licensed or employed and providers are required to maintain their certification.

Licensed early childhood services providers are required to take annual training hours: Self-declared must take 3 hours; Family providers must take 9 hours; Group providers must take 10 hours; Center/Preschool/School-age must take 13 hours. This training could count towards those hours.

The effects of abuse are life-long. We have an obligation to children to do everything we can as a society to protect them.

One of ways would be to mandate "Mandated Reporting Training" for early childhood professionals/teachers on an annual basis. The training is free, on-line, and 1 hour or less.

Thank you for considering this legislation.